

Dissent

\$7.50 / Summer 2002 / \$9.50 Canada

An Empire of Cant
Mitchell Cohen

The Cultural Cold War
Jeffrey C. Isaac

From Che to Marcos
Jeffrey W. Rubin

Janet Kauffman
Farm Mythology

George Packer
V.S. Naipaul's
Pursuit of Happiness

Marshall Berman
Love & Theft

Jennifer Baumgardner
Feminist Classics

LEFT
IST
CON
TEN
TION

Reconsiderations

David Glenn on Michael Harrington's
THE OTHER AMERICA



ATHAN THEOHARIS
Chasing Spies

The foremost authority on the FBI's record shows why and how the Bureau under Hoover failed to apprehend Soviet spies but promoted the politics of McCarthyism in the cold war years. The book raises urgent new uncertainties about FBI capabilities and behavior under expanded powers. "*Chasing Spies* greatly illuminates this notable FBI counterintelligence failure."—ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.



PRIMO LEVI
The Search for Roots

A collection of writings that Levi considered to be essential reading—an anthology that is both universal and poignantly autobiographical. Translated with an Introduction by Peter Forbes, with an Afterword by Italo Calvino.

MICHEL CARMONA
Haussmann

A splendid new account of the Baron's life and times, and of the making of modern Paris. "More than merely a thoroughly researched biography of a fascinating man, this engaging book traces the potent mix of vision, power, and real estate that created the Paris we know today."—WITTOLD RYBCZYNSKI.



WENDY McELROY, EDITOR
Liberty for Women

The distinguished contributors argue for individual rights and personal responsibilities, and offer surprising views on a wide range of women's issues. "Mainstream feminism long ago ran into a variety of false trails and blind alleys....*Liberty for Women* offers just the sort of intellectual barbs so sorely need to jolt a near corpse back into life."—ALEXANDER COCKBURN.

IVAN BUNIN
Sunstroke

A new selection of Bunin's stories, brilliantly translated by Graham Hettlinger, several for the first time in English. "Bunin is, unaccountably, the least translated of the great Russian writers.... This splendid volume takes an important step toward righting a long-standing wrong."—Kirkus Reviews.



Ivan R. Dee, Publisher

Chicago • A Member of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group
At your bookseller, or order toll-free 1-800-462-6420
with a major credit card.

Dissent

EDITORS

MITCHELL COHEN
IRVING HOWE 1920-1993
MICHAEL WALZER

MANAGING EDITOR

MAXINE PHILLIPS

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

MARK LEVINSON

BUSINESS MANAGER

DEBRA PLASTRIK

OFFICE MANAGER/ CIRCULATION DIRECTOR

CAROLINE McLoughlin

WEB SITE PRODUCER

MARILYN McNEAL

INTERNS

BOB BERENS
DAN KOFFLER

EDITORIAL BOARD

BERNARD AVISHAI
JOANNE BARKAN
DAVID BENSMAN
MARSHALL BERMAN
PAUL BERMAN
H. BRAND
DAVID BROMWICH
LUTHER P. CARPENTER
JEAN L. COHEN
LEWIS COSER
BOGDAN DENITCH
JEFF FAUX
CYNTHIA FUCHS EPSTEIN
TODD GITLIN
MURRAY HAUSKNECHT
ROBERT HEILBRONER
AGNÈS HELLER
JEFFREY C. ISAAC
MICHAEL KAZIN
RANDALL KENNEDY
MARTIN KILSON
ERAZIM KOHÁK
WILLIAM KORNBLUM
JEREMY LARNER
DEBORAH MEIER
HAROLD MEYERSON
NICOLAUS MILLS
JO-ANN MORT
BRIAN MORTON
CAROL O'CLEIREACAIN
GEORGE PACKER
MARTIN PERETZ
ANSON RABINBACH
RUTH ROSEN
JAMES B. RULE
ALAN RYAN
PATRICIA CAYO SEXTON
JIM SLEEPER
ANN SNITOW
CORNEL WEST
SEAN WILENTZ
DENNIS WRONG

Editor's Page

LOOK LEFT today and you will see intellectual crisis. Look first at the mainstream. Social democrats led governments across Europe in recent years. Their talk of a "third way" often displaced social imagination. They rushed to be the "center" instead of trying to pull the center to the left. Now they are losing power or are in electoral jeopardy across the continent. ■ The French Socialist Party seemed to be a partial exception. It made a credible effort to balance socialist concerns with market exigencies: it enacted a thirty-five-hour work week, extended health insurance to poorer citizens, reduced unemployment by nine hundred thousand. But it could not link these measures to a larger vision. Lionel Jospin failed to mobilize political support through social legislation and even fled the word "socialist" at election time. ■ Some "radicals" have a canned explanation of what's wrong: nobody is "radical enough." What does this mean? Siphoning off votes, Nader-like, so that governments are delivered into conservative hands? Trotskyists and Jean-Pierre Chevènement's faction did this in France, and "Refoundation Communists" did the same in Italy. They are part of a left-that-never-learns. If the social democratic left is in deep crisis, and if the growth of right-wing populism in Europe is cause for considerable concern, it doesn't follow that the left-that-never-learns offers an alternative. It follows only that extremes burgeon when democratic debate about social justice dissolves into a mythical "middle," and when an "end" is proclaimed to "ideology" and "history." ■ What of movements critical of neoliberal globalization? They have provoked vital arguments about really-existing capitalism and its impact on the world's poor. But there are some worrisome developments. During the early years of the cold war, peace movements surfaced that somehow always "understood" Moscow but viewed all anti-Stalinists, even on the left, as "McCarthyist." Discussion of serious matters such as nuclear proliferation was effectively hijacked. A similar danger arises today if a 1960s-style third worldism (a legacy of the left-that-never-learns) hijacks the agenda of critics of neoliberalism. Indictment of global economic inequality is in danger of being conflated with intellectually corrupt efforts to "understand" Osama bin Laden and to turn Yasir Arafat into Nelson Mandela. ■ *Dissent* has tried since September 11 to sharpen debate within the left. We continue and broaden the effort in this issue. Jeffrey W. Rubin's article on the evolution of the Latin American left, Jeffrey C. Isaac's reconsideration of the cultural cold war, and my own essay raise some troubling matters for the left. None of them addresses the events of September 11 directly, but they all imply what many people are thinking—that a lot of revision is needed if a meaningful left is to carry on.

M.C.

Summer 2002

Editor's Page

MITCHELL COHEN

I

Comments and Opinions

JOSEPH M. SCHWARTZ traces the origins of the Enron scandal, 5

SHERI ALPERT describes medical consumers' losing battle
to protect their privacy, 8

BOGDAN DENITCH assesses the situation in former Yugoslavia, 12

Articles

An Empire of Cant

Hardt, Negri, and Postmodern Political Theory

MITCHELL COHEN

17

Rethinking the Cultural Cold War

JEFFREY C. ISAAC

29

From Che to Marcos

The Changing Grassroots Left in Latin America

JEFFREY W. RUBIN

39

The Fantasy of the Clip Art Farm

Notes from the New Rural Landscape

JANET KAUFFMAN

48

Corporate Crime and Voting Rights

STEPHEN J. FORTUNATO, JR.

56

That Seventies Show
Travels with Older Feminists
JENNIFER BAUMGARDNER

62

Love and Theft
From Jack Robin to Bob Dylan
MARSHALL BERMAN

67

Arguments

NELSON LICHTENSTEIN and DAPHNE EVIATAR debate union strategies, 75

Reconsiderations

DAVID GLENN looks at Michael Harrington's *The Other America*

81

Books

GEORGE PACKER on V.S. Naipaul's work, 85

JAMES T. CAMPBELL on Glenn C. Loury's

The Anatomy of Racial Inequality, 90

STEPHEN F. DIAMOND on Joe Studwell's *The China Dream* and Azizur

Rahman Khan and Carl Riskin's *Inequality and Poverty*

in China in the Age of Globalization, 95

JOHN PALATTELLA on Adam Zagajewski's *Solidarity, Solitude,*

Two Cities, and *Another Beauty*, 100

Letters

105

The Last Page

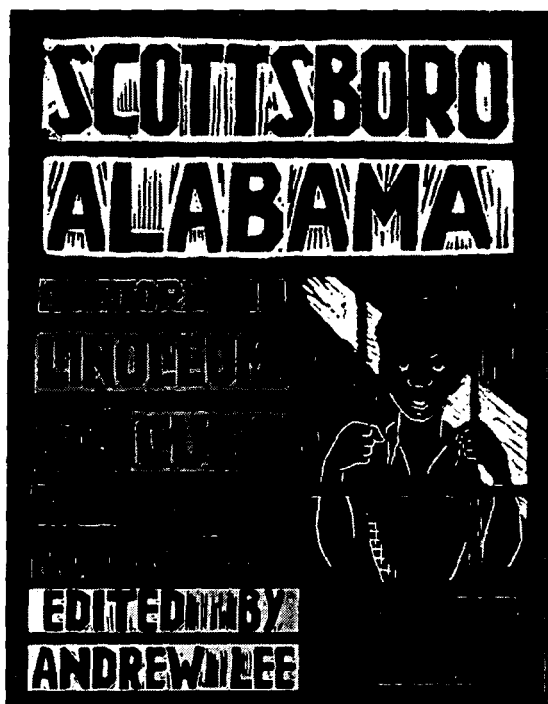
Michael Bellamy

112

Dissent (ISSN 0012-3846), issued July 1, 2002, is published quarterly—winter, spring, summer, and fall—by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc., 310 Riverside Drive, #1201, New York, N.Y. 10025. Phone: 212-316-3120. Web site: <http://www.dissentmagazine.org>. E-mail: for new subscriptions: orders_dissent@fulcoinc.com; for subscription inquiries: custsvc_dissent@fulcoinc.com; for editorial and all other inquiries: editors@dissentmagazine.org. Address for subscriptions: *Dissent*, Subscription Services Department, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-3000. Subscriptions: \$24.00 for one year; \$40.00 for two years; \$17.00 for students for one year; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add \$7.00 for mailing costs per year; institutional rate \$34.00 per year, \$58.00 for two years; single copy \$7.50. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency. For special rates on bulk orders from organizations, teachers, etc., write directly to *Dissent*. For information on newsstand and bookstore distribution, call Ingram Periodicals at 1-615-213-3660. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to *Dissent*, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, N.J. 07834-3000. © 2002 by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc. (FSISI). Permission to reprint any article must be obtained from the publishers. **Manuscripts** must contain a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Volume 49, Number 3 (whole No. 208). Made in U.S.A. ISSN 0012-3846. *Dissent* does not engage in lobbying or support candidates or legislation. Opinions expressed in signed articles and editorials are entirely those of the authors. Cover designs by Robert Delboy. *Dissent* is indexed in the Alternative Press Index, the Infotrak Academic Index, Left Index, *Magazine Article Summaries*, the *PAIS Bulletin*, University Microfilms, Inc. (UMI), the *Social Sciences Index*, the *Social Science Source*, and *Sociological Abstracts*. *Dissent* is a member of the Independent Press Association.

**"Wow! This is political art
at its most powerful."**

—Alan Dershowitz, author of *Supreme Injustice*



Scottsboro, Alabama

A Story in Linoleum Cuts

Lin Shi Khan and Tony Perez

Edited by Andrew Lee

Foreword by Robin D.G. Kelley

\$26.95 ♦ 118 b&w linograph prints



A true historical find, discovered among the papers of Joe North, an editor of leftist journal *New Masses* and a leader in the Communist Party USA. This book provides a unique graphic history of one of the most infamous, racially charged episodes in the annals of the American judicial system.



NYU PRESS

www.nyupress.nyu.edu ♦ 1-800-996-NYUP

The Enron Debacle

Casino Capitalism and Lemon Socialism

Joseph M. Schwartz

IN SEPTEMBER 2001, the Enron Corporation ranked as the seventh largest U. S. transnational firm in terms of total balance-sheet revenues. We now know how cooked its books really were. But in the seven years preceding the scandal, *Fortune* magazine had ranked Enron as our most innovative firm. What did Enron do? It traded almost anything on its futures and derivatives markets and produced almost nothing. Enron's rise from a sleepy Southwest gas pipeline owner to a privatized corporate gaming casino in which speculators could literally bet on the future of the weather epitomizes the irrationality of unregulated capitalism. Beginning with the Carter administration's deregulation of the savings and loans (S&L), transportation, and telecommunications industries, advocates of deregulation promised what John Maynard Keynes argued could never exist (and in fact doesn't): a self-adjusting free market economy that would be efficient in both the short and long runs.

The mainstream media frame the Enron scandal as a story of political insider trading: Bush's Texas buddies using political connections to garner (de)regulatory breaks and manipulate energy prices. Political corruption is part of the story, but beneath the ideological cover of "corruption and influence buying" lies a starker reality. The corporate media have trumpeted deregulation and social welfare cutbacks as creating a mean and lean twenty-first-century capitalism. Mean and lean in regards to staffing levels, perhaps; but efficient, no. The dirty secret is that financial deregulation leads to speculative bubbles and bursts. As Keynes first pointed out seventy years ago, financial markets can never be self-regulating because they are based on uncertain informa-

tion about future economic performance. To prevent speculative booms and busts, the democratic state needs to regulate the wild price swings of financial markets caused by, as Keynes put it, speculators devoting their "intelligence to anticipating what average opinion expects the average opinion to be."

Thus, throughout the history of market economies, "speculative bubbles" have formed and burst because investors in financial markets focus on one another's likely behavior rather than on economic fundamentals.

The roots of the Enron scandal go back two decades. Prior to 1980, federal law limited savings and loans banks to lending for home mortgages, which were further regulated by federal ceilings on interest rates. For years, commercial banks campaigned to deregulate interest rates and to enter the home mortgage arena. In return, they proposed that S&Ls be given more liberal accounting rules and allowed to enter the commercial real estate market. In early 1980, Congress passed a financial deregulation bill that did everything the banks wanted.

By 1985, with the collapse of oil prices in the Southwest, thirty to forty billion dollars in S&L commercial real estate loans had already gone bad. Even though regulatory economists at the Federal Home Loan Bank Board and maverick Democratic Representative Henry Gonzalez of Texas warned of the dangers ahead, the S&L industry lobbied successfully to prevent an increase in its federal deposit insurance premium to pay off the losses. The first signs of crisis were ignored. By the 1990 recession, S&Ls across the country could not meet their deposit obligations because of massive defaults on speculative real estate loans. The federal deposit insurance funds couldn't cover them. The result: a two hundred billion dollar bailout of the S&L industry by U.S. taxpayers. This lemon socialism, in which the victims of the risks pick up the tab for the failed

risk-takers, prefigured the solution to the Enron collapse. This time, the victims were not the taxpayers as a whole, but those employees whose pensions depended upon their forced holdings of Enron stock.

In response to the Enron scandal, the mainstream media have called for common-sense reforms such as banning financial auditors from selling management services to the very firms whose accounting practices they vet. Yet the editorialists at CNBC and the *Wall Street Journal* have yet to criticize deregulation. Nor will CNBC analysts tell you that privatization and public sector cuts are part of a deregulatory strategy that aims ultimately to eliminate all government regulation of labor markets. According to free market ideologues, a democratic state should not enforce health and safety rules or defend the right of labor to organize—since “cost-cutting” benefits all by making industry globally competitive.

Enron employees learned a painful lesson from the decimation of their private pensions, which were largely invested in Enron stock. Free market ideology claims that risk-takers should receive great rewards if their risks pay off. What gets lost in this argument is the other side of the coin: risk-takers should also pay the costs if their risks fail. Instead, the employees bear the risks, and will continue to do so in the absence of strong social insurance—high-value, defined-benefit pensions and universal health care. But there is indeed a kind of social insurance. As the managers at Long Term Capital Investment (LTC) learned in spring 1997, when a major finance firm fails, the federal government will come to the rescue. In LTC's case, the Federal Reserve arranged for eight billion dollars of emergency bank financing.

ENRON'S UNREGULATED private derivatives markets were made possible by the Clinton administration. (Derivatives are complex financial instruments that allow economic actors to hedge against extreme movements in prices and interest rates; if unregulated, however, they encourage further speculative behavior.) In 1993, Enron persuaded the Securities and Exchange Commission to grant it an exemption from the Public Utility Holding Company Act, a depression-era law that

forbids utilities from investing in unrelated risky businesses. In 1997, the SEC granted Enron a further exemption from the Investment Company Act of 1940, which prevented U.S.-based firms from leaving debt from foreign power plants off their books.

This second deregulatory move by the Clinton administration's SEC allowed Enron to create what turned out to be its Achilles' heel—the famous offshore “Star Wars” companies (named Chewco, Jedi, Raptor, Braveheart, and so on). These extremely leveraged offshore companies financed risky foreign energy purchases (including the famous Indian power plant that Dick Cheney lobbied for) by huge investor loans, with Enron stock as collateral. When these foreign investments went bad, Enron's stock became increasingly diluted and its price plunged.

In the private derivative markets administered by Enron, speculators could bet on future price trends in telecommunications, bandwidth, and energy. Absent SEC regulation, investors could increase their risk by buying on margin (where an investor only has to put down a small percent of his or her potential total liability, but is liable for the full value of any final losses). On Enron's Internet markets, one could hedge against the weather; Enron even set up a private fund for hedging against possible bankruptcy. We may yet discover that Enron executives made a killing by betting that their own company would go under.

When Enron's bubble burst, large pension funds, including those of state employees in California and New York, lost billions of dollars. Such a massive loss occurred in part because of the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999. Glass-Steagall had prevented finance banks (which raise capital for corporations) from owning brokerage firms and commercial banks (which lend money to corporate firms). The ending of Glass-Steagall meant that J.P. Morgan, Citicorp, and Bank of America not only underwrote bonds for Enron, but also traded derivative contracts with the company and bought stock in the firm. These massive conglomerate banks also used their financial analysts and brokerage firms to peddle Enron's stock to the public and private pension funds they advise. The interest these banks had in

propping up Enron's stock not only cost their clients dearly; lured by massive investment banking fees, J.P. Morgan, for example, was left holding the bag on \$2.6 billion in Enron debt. This behavior is exactly what Glass-Steagall's ban on the "one-stop shopping" of joint commercial-finance banks aimed to prevent.

THE ENRON DEBACLE is not only a story of the calamities that befall a political system that is sold to the highest corporate bidder. Getting private money out of politics is only one piece of the reform puzzle. The deeper, radical truth is that Enron epitomizes the dangers of the speculative "free market" mania that has resulted in deregulation and the gutting of the public sector in favor of the fool's quest for short-term profit. The other side of speculative profit is speculative bust, the costs of which fall on small investors and workers rather than on corporate executives routinely rescued by government bailouts and "golden parachutes."

The American public was fooled once by Reaganomics (and its neoliberal Democratic partners). Can it be fooled again by a Bush administration that trumpets the Enron collapse as the healthy "creative destruction" that characterizes capitalist competition? While Bush fiddles with regulatory reform, the administration's budget replays Reaganomics' perverse military Keynesianism—deficit financing of a massive military buildup and upwardly redistributive tax giveaways. This summer's congressional battles will witness another round in the fight against the gutting of the democratic public sector and basic in-

come support. A corporate-dominated mass media that worships at the altar of laissez-faire ideology will not help the public understand that the Bush administration is trying to replay supply-side economics without the now disgraced title. Progressive social movements will have to work hard to make sure the American public does not get fooled again.

The Enron collapse is not a footnote to an otherwise healthy global capitalism. Rather, it is another calamitous product of a deregulated financial system that places all the costs of corporate risk-taking on ordinary citizens and allows the speculative risk-takers to get away with—for them—costless failure. The regulatory economic regime established by the New Deal saved American capitalism from the short-sightedness of American capitalists. A global corporate order that puts short-term profits ahead of long-term economic prudence necessitates a resurgent global labor movement and a social democratic left to redress the pain inflicted by the system's speculative excesses. Until the appearance of these two, there are likely to be more victims of Enron-type failures. And it is further likely that those who rely on the mainstream media to explain the subsequent debacles will not fathom their true cause: neoliberal deregulation. ●

JOSEPH M. SCHWARTZ is chair of the political science department at Temple University and a member of the National Political Committee of Democratic Socialists of America. He is finishing a book on the future of democratic equality in the United States.

To Our Contributors

A few suggestions:

- (1) Be sure to keep a copy of your manuscript. And please remember that we can't consider articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.
- (2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.
- (3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. Please use inclusive language so that we don't have to make adjustments during editing. If you are submitting to *Dissent* electronically, our e-mail address is editors@dissentmagazine.org.
- (4) Notes and footnotes should also be typed double-spaced, on a *separate* sheet. As we're not an academic journal, we prefer that they, wherever possible, be dropped altogether or worked into the text.
- (5) We're usually quick in giving editorial decisions. If there's a delay, it's because a few editors are reading your article.

THE EDITORS

Medical Privacy: The Data Wars

Sheri Alpert

SINCE HIPPOCRATES, providers and seekers of medical care have sought to protect the confidentiality of their communications. Medicine has probably done better than most professions in realizing such aspirations—at least until the last few decades. But by the end of the twentieth century, a volatile combination of bureaucratized medicine and sophisticated information technologies had upended those expectations. As California privacy activist Beth Givens relayed it, today's version of the Hippocratic Oath might state,

Whatever I see or hear in my attendance on the sick or even apart therefrom will be divulged to physicians, nurses, aides, surgeons, anesthesiologists, dietitians, physical therapists, admitting clerks, billing clerks, utilization review personnel, discharge planners, records coders, medical records filing staff, chaplains, volunteers, performance evaluators, insurers, medical transcriptionists, accrediting agencies, public health officials, other government officials, social workers, and employers. AND to whoever else requests them for whatever reason.

All these parties can and often do gain access to medical records today—and so do many others. Anyone seeking to challenge or limit such access faces an increasingly unequal struggle. The reasons for this steady erosion of medical privacy have little to do with the values or wishes of patients—who almost universally would prefer more control over their own information, and less disclosure. Instead, they are enmeshed in the rapidly evolving politics and economics of medical care—and in the technologies for generating, transmitting, analyzing, and using patients' medical data. These developments have turned data on patients'

medical conditions into a *commodity*—and created market pressures for appropriation and use of this commodity regardless of patients' wishes and needs. An example of this phenomenon is the Bush administration's proposed easing of restrictions on the release of patients' medical data for a variety of marketing activities, with no ability for patients to opt out.

The Stakes

The reasons for the ever increasing pressure to record and disclose medical data go well beyond the fact that there are more interested parties than before. They have to do with the growing value of medical information. Genetic information, personal and family medical history, diet and lifestyle information—such data increasingly reveal not only the patient's past but also his or her likely future. Massaged via sophisticated, computer-based analyses, such data have the potential to foretell what diseases and debilities we could be subject to in years to come. In a world where access to and use of medical care are governed by highly competitive markets, the struggle for access to such data is intense. Would-be employers and providers of medical coverage want to know as much as possible about what is in store for those with whom they deal—which prospective employees are likely to be subject to which job-related complaints, for example, or which applicants for insurance are subject to illnesses requiring expensive treatment. (Whether it is always legal or ever ethical for prospective employers and insurers to gain access to this information is a separate question.) As so often happens in market situations, the economic burden shifts to those whose needs are greatest and who can least afford it. Clearly the role of information is by no means beneficent in these situations. No wonder patients want to maintain control over "their" data—or that commercial interests struggle so effectively to

erode that control.

Virtually every medical communication or transaction these days—from one's confidences to caregivers to laboratory tests to prescriptions—is noted in medical records. Like other sorts of data, these are increasingly included in computerized databases. It is hard to imagine any repository of personal data more tempting to a wider array of interests.

Patients, for their part, generally do not want the information they disclose to medical care providers to be shared widely beyond the confines of the clinical encounter. And there are good medical reasons for respecting those wishes. The less confident we are that information will remain confidential, the less likely we are to supply care providers with all the information needed for our treatment.

Several recent surveys attest to the depths of patient anxiety on these counts. The California Health Care Foundation, in early 1999, found that 60 percent of Americans trust doctors, hospitals, or other health care professionals to keep their information confidential most of the time. Only 35 percent trust health plans or government medical programs (such as Medicare) to protect their health records. Fully 15 percent of Americans have taken defensive measures to protect their medical privacy: seeking another doctor, paying out-of-pocket to avoid filing an insurance claim, not seeking care to avoid disclosure of an illness or condition to an employer, giving inaccurate or incomplete information to the provider, or asking the provider to omit information from their medical record. Over half of Americans surveyed see the increasing computerization of medical information as the most serious threat to medical privacy.

A Gallup Organization survey in September 2000 found strong opposition to access by nonmedical interests to medical records without explicit patient permission. Surprisingly, 71 percent even oppose giving *doctors* access to their medical records without permission, and 67 percent oppose giving medical researchers access without patient consent. Unfortunately, few Americans grasp the inadequacy of protections governing their medical records. Most believe that "doctor-patient privilege" protects the confidentiality of their records. Few people

realize that the privilege has legal force only at the state level, or that such state law is generally weak and piecemeal. To generalize sweepingly, but not unfairly: in the competition to control the flow of medical information, patients are increasingly losing to better organized, more resourceful parties. This situation will only be exacerbated through the continuing computerization of medical data.

The Players

Who is involved in the quest for data? The cast of characters began to widen with the passage in 1973 of the Health Maintenance Organization and Resources Development Act, sponsored by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.). The purpose of the act was to encourage the establishment or expansion of health maintenance organizations by providing federal grants and loans to public and nonprofit private health care providers and to introduce market-based mechanisms (and some measure of cost containment) into health care.

Over the next several years, HMOs turned to strategies that relied heavily on collecting and analyzing data from clinical encounters between patients and providers to contain costs. Fortunately for many HMOs, such data were easily available and increasingly computerized. Indeed, these strategies could not have gone forward so well without computerization.

By the mid-1990s, profit-seeking businesses had begun to acquire HMOs and other medical care organizations (MCOs). This move further entrenched the data collection and analysis practices of MCOs, as the corporate interests sought to maximize profits and minimize costs (by analyzing data on care being provided). As Americans increasingly realize, this development has changed doctor-patient relationships—among other things, by injecting a corporate interest into the provision of health care and the use of patients' data. The pervasive appetite for analysis of trends and patterns in medical care consumption that dominates so much health care administration today is clearly both cause and result of such changes. Market-driven rationalization of medical care administration and computerization of medical data feed on one another.

The American Health Information Man-

agement Association (AHIMA) recently estimated that, on average, 150 people have access to a patient's medical records during a typical hospitalization. The federal Department of Health and Human Services noted that although "many of these individuals have a legitimate need to see all or part of a patient's records, no laws govern who those people are, what information they are able to see, and what they are and are not allowed to do with that information once they have access to it." HHS also acknowledges that the number of places maintaining and transmitting individual health information has increased dramatically over the last decade.

The National Research Council (NRC), in a 1997 report, noted the range of entities that share identifiable health information: health insurance companies, clinical laboratories, pharmacies, pharmacy benefits managers, consulting physicians, local hospitals, state and federal statistical agencies, accrediting organizations, employers (particularly if they self-insure), life insurance companies, the insurance industry's Medical Information Bureau, and managed care companies. The costs of relying on computer technology (particularly data storage) have decreased so dramatically over recent decades that they are no longer a barrier to collecting increasing amounts of information. As MCOs have come to play a larger and larger part in health care delivery and administration, they have invested more and more heavily in information technology. The NRC report estimated that spending on electronic medical record systems would grow by 70 percent annually between 1995 and 2000 (with spending in 2000 to be around \$1.5 billion).

Political developments have further sharpened these trends. In 1996, Congress passed the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), to improve the efficiency of health care "by encouraging the development of . . . standards and requirements for the electronic transmission of certain health information." Part of that legislation provided that within three years of passage (that is, by August 1999) Congress would have to pass legislation to protect medical privacy. The notion that the tangle of potent and conflicting interests in Americans' medical information could

be resolved over such a short period now seems little short of quaint.

Medical Privacy Legislation

Unsuccessful attempts to limit invasions of medical privacy go back more than two decades. In 1980, for example, the House of Representatives debated the Federal Privacy of Medical Information Act, which would have provided, for the first time, federal protection for medical records. The bill would have established a right for patients to inspect, copy, amend, and correct their medical records; it would have required that medical facilities prepare written notices to patients describing disclosures that could be made of their medical information, both with and without the patient's consent. Among the latter was a provision for disclosures without consent for domestic and foreign intelligence purposes. The bill also embodied special, more stringent criteria for disclosure of psychiatric records.

This last point doomed the legislation. On December 1, 1980, Representative Edward Boland (D-Mass.) stood on the House floor and pronounced the bill a serious threat to national security. Because the bill imposed a higher standard for disclosure of mental health records, Boland reasoned (probably erroneously) that passage might interfere with the conduct of foreign intelligence or Secret Service investigations. Given the lack of cooperation by Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in the Pentagon Papers investigation a few years before, Boland's statement was the kiss of death. Not even all of its eighteen co-sponsors voted for the bill in the end. The final tally was 97 for and 259 against.

This episode marked the start of an odyssey to establish federal protections for personal medical information—a struggle culminating this year in a clash between privacy interests and the Bush administration's efforts on behalf of what one might call the health care-industrial complex. No other medical privacy bill has made it to the floor for a vote since 1980, in either chamber. In the vacuum left by the failure of the 1980 measure, institutional interests have shaped medical data collection and management to suit their needs. These vested interests constantly pour money into lobbying ef-

forts and campaign contributions, in their single-minded determination to preserve their largely unfettered ability to obtain medical data and use such data to shape Americans' access to medical care and other opportunities.

In 1996, Congress tried again to protect medical privacy. HIPAA mandated that Congress pass legislation to provide federal protection of health care information. Congress imposed a three-year deadline on itself to accomplish the feat. Once again, it failed. No proposal made it out of committee in either the House or Senate. Under the terms of the act, the task then fell to the Department of Health and Human Services to promulgate medical privacy regulations. Even such regulations coming from HHS would perform go well beyond present federal law, which (with some narrow exceptions) protects only those records in the custody of the federal government.

In an arduous process, HHS issued draft rules in late October 1999 and collected more than 52,000 comments by the following February. The Department took until December 28, 2000, to consider all the comments and issue the final rules. The Bush administration treated this as one of the "last minute" rules issued by the outgoing Clinton administration—and hence subject to new scrutiny.

The upshot, on March 21, was a proposal by the Bush administration to curtail privacy guarantees embodied in the Clinton administration rules, so as to grant insurance companies and other interests access to medical data without patient consent. Instead of requiring such consent, the new rules would simply require that patients be notified at some point of the uses being made of "their" data—a relaxation welcomed by the insurance industry and deplored by privacy advocates. Other changes proposed by the administration would make it easier for parents to gain access to their teenage children's medical records—a measure certain to please the far right. In one bright spot, the administration has proposed to allow patients preemptively to bar their records from dissemination to certain marketing interests. But many activities bracketed in the Clinton rules as marketing are redefined by the Bush team as "recommending treatment." As a result, drug companies could pay pharmacies to

hype their products to patients, according to medical needs revealed through the latter's prescriptions.

Democrats and privacy advocates have opposed the relaxation of Clinton-era safeguards. On April 26, the thirty-day comment period ended on the Bush administration's proposal to further weaken the rule. Once again, thousands of comments were filed. The Department of Health and Human Services will propound a final rule, perhaps by fall of this year, which will have the force of law.

The Bottom Line

Though the updated version of the Hippocratic Oath cited earlier may not describe present-day American practice in every respect, it is too close to the truth for comfort. The new federal rules are unlikely to alter the situation more than incrementally. Although the opportunities for indiscriminate use of medical data are greater than twenty years ago, twenty years of effort to curb misuse have yielded protections hardly more far-reaching than those proposed in 1980.

The odd thing about nearly all privacy issues is that even though *everyone* is affected by them, public activism remains rare. Only recently have ordinary citizens begun to comprehend the scope of what's at stake for them. Meanwhile, the health care-industrial complex has been working to define patient privacy as a *competing* interest to medical management, requiring a balancing act, in which private citizens' needs are somehow weighed against those of corporate advantage.

Could things turn around? Perhaps the best we can hope for are some dramatic scandals over medical privacy to get the debate properly focused on real abuses to real patients. This would be the medical equivalent to the outcry over the release of Judge Robert Bork's video rental records during the hearings on his failed nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court—which led, in record time, to the Video Privacy Protection Act. Unfortunately, nothing short of that is apt to galvanize the U.S. Congress. ●

SHERI ALPERT is on the faculty of the University of Notre Dame and has been writing about medical and genetic privacy for several years.

The Balkan Endgame

Bogdan Denitch

TEN YEARS have passed since the bloody carnage began in Bosnia, initiated by Serbian nationalist forces led by Slobodan Milosevic. To be sure, the Serbs were not alone. Croatia's separatists, led by an equally authoritarian former communist general, Franjo Tudjman, reveled in chauvinist nostalgia for the pro-Nazi Ustase regime. They drove their substantial Serbian minority to an ill-considered armed revolt, backed and funded by Belgrade. Bosnia-Herzegovina, with its mostly secular Muslim plurality, found itself stuck between two rival nationalisms, Serb and Croat, agreed in only one thing—to divide Bosnia between them, leaving the Bosnian Muslims at best a minor bantustan.

What followed was carnage on a scale not seen in Europe since the Second World War—until the international community, through the belated use of NATO airpower, imposed peace in the fall of 1995. Bosnia suffered around two hundred thousand casualties; two-and-a-half million refugees fled, three hundred thousand of them probably permanently, to Western Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. These last were for the most part the best-educated and well-trained young people. The country's population has been brutally moved around, by "ethnic cleansing" by the three sides, so that most now live in ethnically homogeneous areas. The towns have been flooded by displaced rural masses. While the U.S.-sponsored Dayton Agreement in 1995 imposed an effective if unloved peace on Bosnia-Herzegovina, enforced by the continued presence of NATO and Russian troops, it took at least one more major military intervention in Kosovo to break the Serbian regime's desire for military adventures and ethnic

cleansing. In October 2000, Milosevic was finally overthrown, after refusing to concede a lost election, and replaced by relatively decent if somewhat reluctant reformers.

Today the weak, post-authoritarian reform governments in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia share many features. All three include an uneasy mix of moderate social democrats, liberals, nationalists, and crooks. All three have inherited more or less unchanged military, police, secret service, and judiciary structures from their authoritarian nationalist predecessors. All three preside over devastated economies overrun by mafia-like organizations that their predecessors placed in power. All three have, to put it mildly, an ambivalent relationship toward media freedom, human rights, and the right of refugees to return. All three use unreformed courts against journalists and writers. All three are reluctant to move against their own war criminals or to acknowledge the responsibility of their predecessors for massive violations of human rights. All three are firmly under the thumb of neoliberal international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Finally, all three have unstable quarreling coalitions, with the old authoritarian nationalists in opposition, thirsting for power and revenge.

The irony is that the nationalist separatists have managed to create states far less independent than Tito's Yugoslavia was. With the exception of Slovenia in the North, which managed a successful exit in 1990, all the former Yugoslav states are also far less prosperous than Yugoslavia was. Despite the robust pro-natalist policies of official churches and nationalist governments, all three suffer negative birth rates (the only exception is the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia). Except for gangsters and the *nomenklatura*—sometimes the same, or at least related—the middle class has been pauperized.

Can one find some generalized lessons in

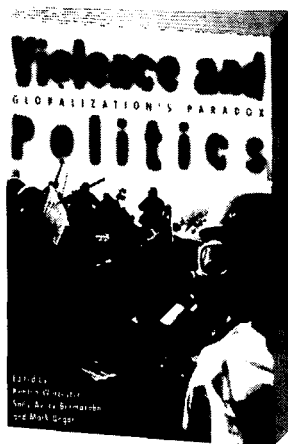
all this suffering? I reject two major paradigms that guide most of my academic colleagues and most American politicians dealing with the region. One is that age-old, deep-rooted hatreds, going back hundreds and hundreds of years, shape the conflict, that ordinary Serbs and Croats hold deep grievances about things that happened five hundred years ago. I do not believe this is true. Instead, I think that a catastrophic failure of the political and intellectual classes in Yugoslavia as a whole—primarily in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia—is mainly responsible for the bloody collapse of the country. This failure of elites was much exacerbated by the failure of international institutions—the United Nations, the European Community, and the United States—to intervene effectively, and above all in time, to stop this slowly unfolding catastrophe. The political elites and the independent intellectuals share responsibility with the media, which were fearful and compliant. The few exceptions only prove that it was possible to resist the ethnic hatred orchestrated from above.

Certainly, it would have been safer to resist if more people had resisted. Some did: people in the nongovernmental organizations, student groups such as the Serbian OTPOR (Resistance), independent unions like

Nezavisnost, and critical journals and radio stations such as Feral in Croatia and Radio 52 in Belgrade. Most of these owed their very existence to outside donors like George Soros. All are now in jeopardy; essential aid is drying up. Aid from the new government and the UN is no substitute; both are bureaucratic and overcautious, supporting only “respectable” NGOs and opposition groups.

We cannot ignore the fact that the death of the secular religion of communism created a value vacuum, which has been filled with all kinds of cultural, historical, and political kitsch. Nationalism, patriotic histories, and shallow official religiosity (often one and the same in the former Yugoslavia), along with arcane conspiracy theories, dominated the media and opinion-making institutions. The history was mostly wrong, and the Catholic and Orthodox hierarchies had precious little in common with Christianity. Nevertheless, this potent mix, a lazy person’s worldview, requiring no critical thought or effort, is still the primary frame of reference. The academies in Belgrade and Zagreb became bastions of nationalism; even some leading philosophers from the Marxist humanist journal *Praxis*, Mihailo Markovic and Ljuba Tadic, became warmongering nationalists. Nationalism still dominates the language and politics of most of what used to be

R O U T L E D G E



VIOLENCE AND POLITICS
Globalization's Paradox
Edited by Kenton Worcester,
Sally Avery Bermanzohn
and Mark Ungar
\$24.95

*“Anyone who doubts that violence is endemic, pervasive, and central to the operations of the modern world system should read **Violence and Politics**. It shows us the range of the objects of violence and the multiplicity of its forms. **A crucial aid to lucid thinking.**”*

—Immanuel Wallerstein, Yale University

*“While edited before the attack on America, the insightful essays contained in **Violence and Politics** illuminate critical and multifaceted dimensions of violence in a globalized world. **This reader could not have been timelier for students and scholars interested in grappling with the dark side of globalization.**”*

—Micheline Ishay, University of Denver

www.routledge-ny.com



1 . 8 0 0 . 6 3 4 . 7 0 6 4

the democratic opposition and is now the government. The only visible difference is that the “democrats” in power are pro-Western and defend neoliberal economics. Otherwise, they share with their predecessors the belief that the world has been uniquely unfair to their own nation. This sense of grievance and entitlement against an unjust world paralyzes the political scene and makes it all but impossible to deal with what can and should be dealt with: the vast criminal structures left in place by the Milosevic, Tudjman, and Izetbegovic governments.

One of the consequences of this paralysis is that refugees are returning at a snail’s pace. Six years after the end of the war, only fifty thousand out of a half million Serbian refugees have been able to return to Croatia. Even fewer have been able to get their homes or businesses back. The figures for Bosnia are just as dismal, despite the efforts of international agencies, the European Union, and, more modestly, the United States pressing for the return or compensation of all refugees. The ugly truth is that most nationalists do not want their fellow nationals living where they do not rule.

THE SECOND PARADIGM that I reject holds that one must pay scrupulous respect to national sovereignty even when carnage occurs. That has been and is a deadly idea in far too many parts of world. Think of Cambodia; Cyprus; East Timor; Afghanistan; Southern Sudan; the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq; Rwanda; Liberia; Sierra Leone; former Yugoslavia, including Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, and Kosovo; and yes, even Palestine/Israel. All of these have something in common: the “locals” don’t have the resources—political, military, and above all moral—to resolve the local disputes. In all of these cases, a solution, even if it is less than perfect, has to be imposed from the outside by some armed surrogate for the world community. In most of them, an imposed solution, combining something like the Bosnian Dayton Agreement with the Cyprus model, would be the least evil outcome. This requires that the imposed peace be firmly maintained by an international force with teeth. That is the main lesson I draw from the Balkan wars.

The dismal reality of the current post-Yu-

goslavia scene is most visible among the educated young. Entire graduating classes of engineers, electro-technicians, computer experts, agronomists, economists, and doctors line up at the gates of the Australian, New Zealand, and Canadian embassies—or any other embassies willing to take applications from emigrants. The impact of the brain drain on the economies of these societies is yet to be felt. Most of these young people will never come back, even if the new regimes place no obstacles in their path.

In Croatia and Serbia, the leading parties are the local “social democrats,” proud members of the Socialist International, whose meetings they regularly attend. The Serbs never hint at social democracy at home, where they are a neoliberal, pro-Western party, claiming to represent modernity and “civilized nationalism.” What all these social democrats have in common is a visceral hostility to trade unions and an uncritical love for privatization. No soft German- or French-style social capitalism for them; the social democrat they like best is Tony Blair.

The Serbian reform government, like its counterparts in Bosnia and Croatia, organizes official religious instruction in the schools. In Croatia this was imposed by the right-authoritarian regime of Tudjman, in Serbia by the democratic reformers who replaced Milosevic. Needless to say, religious instruction is fiercely nationalist. Clericalism is on the rise in both countries. The former liberal and democratic opposition’s lack of political courage explains the continued absence of any political catharsis in Serbia, any willingness to accept responsibility for war crimes, as well as the absence, in Croatia, of any real attempt to acknowledge and deal with the hostility that its resident minorities have faced—especially the Serbs.

Since the old opposition came to power, it has failed even to begin to address the local fascists. It has not gone after the far right militias, now disguised as veterans’ organizations. It has not touched the old judges, bureaucrats, policemen, secret services, or military. In Croatia today it is legal, on radio, on television, and in mass demonstrations to give the fascist salute and sing songs of the World War II fascist movements. Both Belgrade and Zagreb have allowed publication of the infamous, anti-

Semitic tract *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as well as new editions of *Mein Kampf*, which one cannot buy in Germany. This is all done, of course, to show that the societies are liberal, democratic, and tolerant. Ethnic hate speech is not illegal, nor is Holocaust revisionism. Young skinhead thugs bedecked with Nazi, Chetnik, or Ustase symbols parade around and scream slogans of ethnic hatred at concerts and sports matches; they assault the Roma with impunity. State-funded veterans clubs sometimes join them.

Croatia has eight times as many police per capita today as Germany; Serbia is also grossly over-policed, which raises the question for donor nations of why we should continue to aid these regimes. To be sure, they have adopted the tried and true, tighten-your-belt, IMF / World Bank formulas. But the rulers don't tighten their belts by getting rid of excess cops and soldiers or by cutting down the huge salaries and pensions of parliamentary deputies and government bureaucrats. They save money by cutting the already threadbare welfare state and dismissing steel workers, sanitation workers, male nurses, and all married women, who, of course, should be home and, preferably, pregnant. The IMF does not object. The American embassy is wonderfully silent.

The only major politician who has offered an apology for the war horrors thus far is the president of Croatia, Stjepan Mesic, who spoke out when visiting Sarajevo. For this he was roundly denounced in the main Croatian press and by others in the government. Such a gesture is clearly beyond the capacity of the Serbian president, Vojislav Kostunica, who has expressed his disgust at the existence of The Hague court and at the very idea that Serbs might have committed war crimes. The Serb and Croat politicians who hold real power are not going to apologize for crimes committed by their own nationals.

IN THE WARS of the Yugoslav succession, there was an unbelievable ratio of civilian to military deaths: roughly ten to one. Mass graves of civilians are still being discovered throughout Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia. Was there any real battle where two military units actually fought each other? The closest one can

find is the siege of Vukovar in 1991. This Croatian city, with a population about 50 percent Serb and 50 percent Croat, was mercilessly shelled for days by the Yugoslav Army. After the Yugoslavs "won" the battle, they took prisoners out of the hospital and killed several hundred. Yet some of my friends in Belgrade still ask, "Why is the world so mad at us?" Try to get a contemporary Serbian politician to talk about Srebrenica, where, with UN "protectors" present, seven thousand to eight thousand Bosnian men were separated from their families and murdered—the largest single massacre in Europe since the Second World War. No politician has seriously proposed that the Serbs themselves should try these people, without waiting for The Hague court.

In Croatia, when the demand came to take care of their own war criminals, the social democratic-led government had the nerve to say, "It's not true we're not punishing our war criminals; we have actually jailed more than a thousand [!] war criminals." Before coming back, Serb refugees would check with the UN, and ask, "Are there any charges filed against us in Croatia?" The answer would be "No." When they returned, however, they would immediately be charged with genocide, on the novel theory that having been drafted into the Serbian artillery made one guilty of genocide—if one is a Croatian Serb. The Croats themselves recognize the absurdity of this, and so people convicted of genocide are sentenced to four years in prison. The intended effect, of course, is to discourage other refugees from returning. The reformers are thus continuing the ethnocentric policies of their predecessors.

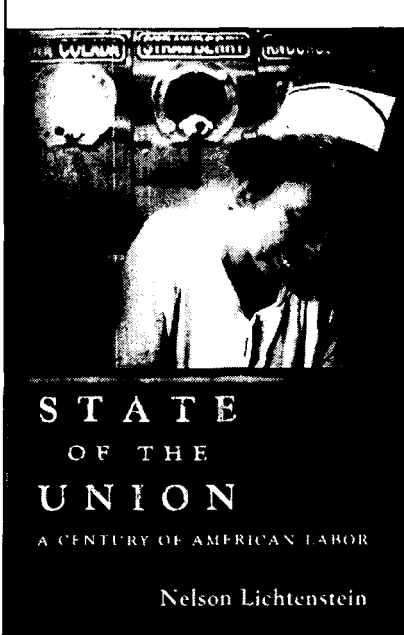
Kostunica insists that The Hague tribunals are illegal. The notion that the international court is not legal because it was set up by the Security Council and not by the General Assembly of the UN, also popular with some Western ultraleftists, is nonsense. The court was not set up by NATO; Russia and China could have vetoed its establishment. The West, the UN, the world community—all share heavily in the responsibility for what happened in Bosnia, Vukovar, Dubrovnik, and Srebrenica, because they did not intervene earlier than they did. But that does not excuse a single act by Milosevic.

The question that really should be raised by people protesting the trial of Milosevic is this: why have the United States, Britain, and France, which are occupying powers in Bosnia, not yet arrested Karadjic and Mladic, the main leaders of the Bosnian Serbs who are most directly responsible for Serbian war crimes? How is it that they dare ask the relatively fragile governments in Zagreb and Belgrade to make politically dangerous arrests when they have failed to do so during six years of occupation?

We have never had a serious debate in the United States about why we are in Bosnia and Kosovo. Of course, we have never had a serious debate about foreign policy goals in the post-cold war world at all. However, pending such a debate, I oppose withdrawing U.S. troops from the Balkans in the near future. My model is Cyprus, which remains divided and peaceful. In any case, why keep troops in garrisons in Germany or Italy rather than Bosnia and Kosovo where they can do some good? But

the occupying authorities should be more proactive, going after Serb, Bosnian, Albanian, and Croat war criminals—and also the local mafias. Unfortunately, the attention span of our political establishment is extraordinarily short. Apparently it can deal with only one issue at a time, and the well-being of the former Yugoslavia is not the current issue. As a consequence, we are not pushing the Croats, the Serbs, the Bosnians, and the Kosovars to make the reforms that must be made if there is to be stability, let alone democracy. There are killers still walking the streets of Zagreb and Belgrade. They are much safer today than human rights workers are. This is not the outcome we looked for when, belatedly and rightly, NATO intervened in the former Yugoslavia. ●

BOGDAN DENITCH is the president of Transitions to Democracy, a nongovernmental organization working on democracy, human rights, and refugee return in Croatia, former Yugoslavia, and Bosnia.



State of the Union

A Century of American Labor

Nelson Lichtenstein

In a fresh and timely reinterpretation, Nelson Lichtenstein examines how trade unionism has waxed and waned in the nation's political and moral imagination, among both devoted partisans and intransigent foes.... Lichtenstein weaves together a compelling matrix of ideas, stories, strikes, laws, and people in a streamlined narrative of work and labor in the twentieth century.

"State of the Union is a uniquely important study of the labor movement in twentieth-century American politics.... This book is a must read for anyone seriously interested in making sense of American politics during the last three-quarters of a century."

—Adolph Reed

Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America
William Chafe, Gary Gerstle, and Linda Gordon, series editors
Cloth \$29.95 ISBN 0-691-05768-0

 **Princeton University Press**

800-777-4726 • WWW.PUP.PRINCETON.EDU

An Empire of Cant

Hardt, Negri, and Postmodern Political Theory

Cant—the word is English and is said to have been first used in the sixteenth century as a description of the saintly singsong of the Puritans. More generally, it denotes an unreal manner of speech, either thoughtlessly repetitive or used with the consciousness of its untruth to attain any kind of object, whether it be a matter of religion or politics, dead theory or living reality.

—Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism*

Mitchell Cohen

AS THE SHAH tottered, Foucault prophesied. Perhaps this revolution would demonstrate “an art of not being governed,” he wrote in the fall of 1978. The mullahs were not “fanatics,” but the voice of the oppressed. An “Islamic government,” he supposed, might initiate a new “political spirituality” of the sort unknown in the West for half a millennium (since modernity’s rise, that is). Look at those demonstrations! A revolt against “the planetary system”! Against “global hegemony”! “Inspired by a ‘religion of combat and sacrifice’! The Iranian revolution could herald a ‘transfiguration’ of the world. And those women who don the veil—what an impressive political statement! Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini? Just “the point of fixation of a collective will.”

After the shah fell, Foucault fumbled. The Iranians, it turned out, were to be governed again. There were “summary trials,” “hasty executions,” and these were “alarming,” he said in an open letter to Mehdi Bazargan, once an oppositionist with whom he conversed about revolutionary events, and now prime minister, thanks to Khomeini’s designation. Did the fact of Iran’s new repression “condemn” the “intoxication” of its revolution, Foucault asked aloud? And he wondered: “In the expression ‘Islamic government,’ why cast suspicion on the adjective ‘Islamic’? The word ‘government’ by itself is enough to awaken vigilance.”¹

Foucault did what postmodernist theorists

(like himself) often warned against. He crammed particular developments into his own intellectual macrocosm and then pronounced on them. Had he approached “Islamic government” on its own grounds, he would have started with classical Islam’s refusal to separate religion and political authority—the notion, as Khomeini once put it, that “all of Islam is politics.” (Khomeini published a book entitled *Islamic Government* a few years before he came to power). Bazargan, often characterized as a Muslim liberal, was out of office within nine months. His government was undermined by competing powers, both macro and micro (the Council of the Islamic Republic, local revolutionary committees). These powers were indeed filled with “political spirituality,” although others might simply call it devout extremism.

It turned out that Khomeini was more than “the point of fixation of a collective will.” And the alternative, if there was one, would still have been some sort of “government.” The only serious question was—what sort? It is difficult to imagine how anyone who followed the Iranian events of 1978-1979 could have envisioned anything but a religious panopticon as their likely result. But a good number of people on the left—Foucault was not alone—did imagine otherwise. To those living outside of Iran, spiritual romance brought no consequences (as earlier romances hadn’t to Western Stalinists or Maoists). Some of them were, of course, duly disturbed when Khomeini later decreed that Salman Rushdie ought to die for his literary imagination. Politicized spirituality can, it seems, be quite vigilant—perhaps more

so than the disciplinary regimes Foucault identified with modernity and the Enlightenment.

Twist-and-Turn

Was Foucault's fumble just that, a fumble? Or was it, as postmodernists like to say, a symptom? I suggest that it was the latter. It was and remains a symptom of something troubling in the kind of left-wing thinking that mixes postmodernism, simplistic third worldism, and illiberal inclinations. The problem is often revealed with acuity when the Middle East is addressed. Not that the Middle East is the sole preoccupation of this style of leftism. It isn't, although an unusual agitation can be detected when this terrain is in focus. I only mean to suggest that the more we deconstruct how this *tiers-mondiste*/postmodern left treats this particular region, and the more some detailed counter-history is presented, the more we find within its polemics a method that I call "twist-and-turn."

You twist, you turn; you sidestep by using fungible formulations and you avoid vexatious details—all while you footnote copiously. You arrive, finally, at the telos—your prejudgment. You show that anything bad that happens in the third world (or the postmodern, globalized version of what we used to call the third world) must really be the fault of "the West" or the "global market." You show that anything Palestinians do is the fault of Israelis. Complex considerations of right and wrong in Western or third world (or Israeli or Palestinian) politics crumble, along with the integrity of anything that might be called a "left" appraisal of them.

A RECENT CASE of twist-and-turn is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, and I want to look at it in some detail. This ambitious tome of nearly five hundred pages has been translated into more than a dozen languages. It is influential on campuses and among segments of the antiglobalization movement. It has even been hailed as a *Communist Manifesto* of our times. According to Hardt/Negri, "today's struggles slither," snake-like, "across . . . superficial, imperial landscapes." But some probing shows that Hardt/Negri are not Marx/Engels; instead, they continue Foucault's fumble. If we begin on a mi-

cro level and examine their treatment of a particular case—with an eye to fragments missing from their story—we'll also see the problem of the macro theory. For instance, about a third of the way into *Empire*, we read that the Iranian revolution was "the first postmodernist revolution." It rejected both modernity and the world market, the authors explain. "The anti-modern thrust that defines fundamentalisms might be better understood . . . not as a premodern but as a *postmodern* project."

It is true that the victorious Iranian clerics rejected the shah's "modernity." But there is more to the story. Khomeini rose to political prominence as a foe of the shah's White (bloodless) Revolution in the early 1960s. This modernizing program called, among other things, for land redistribution, administrative reform, a literacy campaign, nationalization of forests, privatization of state-owned industry along with plans for profit-sharing, and the enfranchisement of women. Had the shah been a megalomaniacal left-wing (and anti-American) dictator rather than a megalomaniacal royal authoritarian, part of the Western left would have cheered these measures—except, perhaps, privatization.

For these measures threatened the most conservative interests in Iranian society, especially large estate owners, the Shi'i clergy (who stood to lose considerable land holdings along with educational and juridical prerogatives), and bazaar merchants—a configuration of social forces much like that which would one day spearhead the shah's overthrow. Social and economic "modernization" also produced considerable dislocation, with few peasants actually getting land and large numbers flocking into the cities. By 1978-1979, the shah's plans floundered, along with his regime, which was deeply corrupt and sustained by a nasty, American-supported security apparatus. In the meantime, bazaar merchants, principal backers of the country's 180,000 mullahs and 80,000 mosques, paid more in religious than state taxes in the 1970s thanks to the global oil market.² Although the revolution was undoubtedly against the shah's rule and its benefactors, it becomes a postmodern revolt against "the world market" only by postmodern splicing. Decline in oil revenues helped to precipitate

the upheaval, but those revenues greased the revolution no less than the faltering state. One can, on the other hand, link readily the 1963 demonstrations against the White Revolution to Khomeini's republic. Mullahs fomented the demonstrations to protest (among other things) the emancipation of women; in power, seventeen years later, mullahs veiled them. "Postmodernism" explains the Iranian Revolution in the manner of Foucault's fumble.

THE POTENCY OF Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt beginning in the 1980s was in some ways a comparable phenomenon. The last half century of Egyptian history can be seen as a series of failed efforts to apply some big, yes "modern," ideas—state nationalism, Pan-Arabism, Arab socialism—to the country's problems. If you undertook to study Egypt at the time of Gamal Abdel Nasser's death in 1970, among the first things you would learn is that its size on a map belies much smaller effective capacities. About 97 percent of the country's population lived on 3 percent of the land (the Nile delta and valley), and the majority was very, very poor. Three decades later, only 2 percent of the land is arable; the population is very, very poor, even more numerous (seventy million); and half of it is under twenty-five years old, with few happy prospects.

In the interim another idea—Anwar Sadat's *infitah* (opening the economy to Western capitalism)—failed, leaving a large breach that fundamentalists sought to fill. Of course they had no economic program—only a more indigenous ideological panacea. But they were hardly a postmodern phenomenon. Muslim fundamentalism had, alternatively, burst out into the public realm and been repressed over decades. Sadat, who served as a link between Nasser's Free Officers underground and the Muslim Brotherhood before the 1952 revolution, let many Brothers out of jail after he became president. He hoped that they would be a counterweight to pro-Soviet forces in Egyptian politics. In the period around the 1973 war, he drew closer to the Saudis, who were actively promoting Wahhabi-influenced fundamentalism in the Muslim world. When Sadat later began to liberalize Egyptian politics, he allowed

fundamentalists growing scope, although he didn't perceive adequately the threat posed by their radicalization. After Sadat's assassination, the Egyptian regime—which is, finally, a military regime—repressed fundamentalists ruthlessly. (Similar measures by an Israeli government would have led to condemnatory UN resolutions for which Cairo would surely have voted.) Iran's military, the shah's mainstay, didn't have a comparable opportunity, partly because the monarch fled, partly because Khomeini's regime neutralized its upper echelons and created competing militia, and, significantly, because Iraq attacked Iran. The ensuing war rallied Iranians and was important in the consolidation of the Islamic republic.

The suffering inflicted by Palestinians and Israelis on each other throughout the last century is dwarfed by the death, destruction, and displacement of populations that resulted from Saddam Hussein's assault on Iran and the Iranian counterattacks. But whereas one can recall paroxysms within the Western left (and among European governments) when Israel bombed Iraq's French-built nuclear reactor in 1981, one won't find comparable agitation about the slaughter—massive, hideous slaughter—of the Iraq-Iran war. Or even acknowledgment that Iraq's regime approximates fascism as much as a third world regime can. Hardt/Negri, for instance, dismiss rationales for the Gulf War. For them, recent debate about just and unjust wars functions as so much ideology. But they have a higher estimation of the function of what they refer to as "so-called fundamentalisms." Contemporary Islamic fundamentalism, they write, "should not be understood as a return to past social forms and values," but as "a new invention."

What is the content of this novelty? One wonders. Interpenetration of religion and state? Then the caliphate of the eighth century must have been postmodern. The use of high technology? Science was resplendent in classical Islamic civilization. It soon becomes clear that the novelty of Islamic fundamentalism for Hardt/Negri lies in what it opposes—or in what Hardt/Negri imagine it opposes. Islamic "modernism," they complain, was "overcoded as assimilation or submission to Euro-American hegemony." And they claim, breathlessly, that

the novelty of “the contemporary resurgence of fundamentalism is . . . the refusal of the powers that are emerging in the new [postmodern] imperial order.”

But the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928. It was anti-imperialist and espoused *Salafiyyah* (the idea that Islam’s “early generations” provide the model for contemporary life). Was the attempted assassination of Nasser in 1954 by one of its members a postmodern transgression? Was Sayyid Qutb, the major intellectual figure of the Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, postmodern when he compared Arab nationalist—“modern,” according to Hardt/Negri—regimes to the *Jahiliyya* (the Quran’s term for the pre-Muhammad era of “ignorance”) and wanted them replaced by a globalizing Islamic state like the original caliphate? If we accept Hardt/Negri, a new caliphate would then be postmodern. (Qutb, whom Nasser executed in 1966, had an enormous influence on fundamentalists throughout the Middle East in the last quarter of the twentieth century.)

WHAT OF Ra’ad Salah, perhaps the leading fundamentalist among Israeli Arabs today? Is he really a postmodern transgressor when he propounds that “all those who claim that women have the right to do with their bodies as they please are implementing anarchy”? When he proclaims that homosexuality is a “great crime”? That seventy virgins await martyrs (read: suicide bombers) in paradise because “we have proof. It is written in the Koran and in the Sunna” [traditions associated with the Prophet Muhammad]? And what of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, spiritual leader of Hamas, the Palestinian fundamentalist organization (which was spawned by the Palestinian Muslim Brothers, whom he once led)? Was he engaged in postmodern revolt against global markets when he declared in March 2002 that “women can carry out suicide actions only if they have the protection of a man alongside them”? Without a chaperone, something untoward might happen en route. Anyway, women should be at home “ensuring the survival of the nation.”³

Some time before postmodernity—over a dozen centuries—ascendant, expanding Islam

posited world struggle between the “Camp of Islam” and the “Camp of War.” This millenarianism always remained a potent tendency within Islam. Applying it to the end of the twentieth century may well have been “new,” but then the end of the twentieth century had not previously occurred. The stripes of fundamentalists—Muslim, Christian, Jewish, liberal, Marxist, nationalist, postmodern, others—may vary, but they share a similar mental structure, a commitment to some system of “eternal” basics that they would impose on the present, and that they always seek to interpret from within. Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful), the Jewish settler movement in the West Bank, combines “modern” religious orthodoxy and nationalism, and finds its “constitution” in the Torah. The Muslim Brotherhood has long declared its “constitution” to be the Quran. Fundamentalist thinking usually draws on some mix of writ and an imagined, distant past—which is why it can appear “radical” when applied to the contemporary world. One scholar, Bassam Tibi, summarizes this well when he writes that Muslim fundamentalists “invoke . . . selectively chosen ‘fundamentals’ (*usul*) of Islam and they present them in a distorted manner as the basics and essence of political-cultural authenticity.”⁴

Thus it is easy for Hardt/Negri to speak interchangeably of Islamic “fundamentalism” and Islamic “radicalism” without branding the radicalism reactionary. The meaning of Islamic “modernism” is fungible for them. But “Islamic modernism” is much more complicated and diverse than “overcoded” compliance with “Euro-American hegemony,” and it has ambiguous ties to fundamentalism. Leading Islamic reformers of the “liberal age,” thinkers like al-Tahtawi or al-Afghani or Muhammad Abduh, were advocates of an Islamic revival based on fundamentals along with reform, all while having critical but multitextured understandings of their faith’s relation to the “modernity,” rationality, and “the West.”⁵ The Muslim Brotherhood itself designated its own fundamentalism as Muslim “modernity.”

“Contemporary Islamic radicalisms,” Hardt/Negri inform us, are based “primarily” on “*ijtihad*.” They explain that this Arabic phrase means “original thought” and that Is-

lamic radicals are engaged in “the invention of original values and practices, which perhaps echo those of other periods . . . but are really directed in reaction to the present social order.” If we look a little more closely, we find that Hardt/Negri on “*ijtihad*” are much like Foucault on “Islamic government.” This term actually comes from eighth- and ninth-century Islamic jurisprudence. It means an individualized effort at legal reasoning in the interpretation and application of religious law. A *mujtahid* (“one who exerts”) does not invent original values; he deduces rules of behavior from holy sources.

Ijtihad has a complex role throughout Islamic history. In the eighteenth century, that is, some two centuries before postmodernity, the Wahhabi sect espoused it as part of a return to Islamic basics (that is, to the Quran, the Sunna, and to the legacy of Islam’s “early generations”). These fundamentalists, spiritual forebears of the Saudi regime, also championed a puritanical egalitarianism of believers in opposition to what they perceived to be decadence in the Islamic world. In the nineteenth century, it was Islamic “modernists”—al-Afghani, Abduh, others—who argued for *ijtihad*. Rashid Rida, Abduh’s student, did so, and his notion of an Islamic state was similar to that embraced by the Muslim Brotherhood and the leaders of Iran’s revolution.⁶

In short, everything about this term, and about the relation between fundamentalism and modernism, is more complex, both historically and conceptually, than allowed by Hardt/Negri’s binary oppositions. The “discourses” of postmoderns and fundamentalists are antithetical “in most respects,” write Hardt/Negri, yet “postmoderns and the current wave of fundamentalists have arisen not only at the same time but also in response to the same situation, only at opposite poles of the global hierarchy.” But where do the Saudis fit in this hierarchy? Has the spread of Wahhabi fundamentalism, always an extreme, minority variant within Islam, been driven by the wretched of the postmodern earth? Or has it been fueled globally by Saudi oil revenues? Without global oil markets, the Saudis—and also Osama bin Laden’s coterie, most of whom come from comfortable families—would have

succeeded little in their efforts to identify their sectarianism with Muslim civilization. Rivalry between the (Wahhabi, Arab) Saudis and the (Shiite, Persian) Khomeinists for hegemony among Muslim movements throughout the Middle East and beyond explains considerably more about the spread of fundamentalism than do the categories of postmodern theorists. Both countries, Saudi Arabia and Iran, were commonly situated in the “global hierarchy,” but they also sit across from each other on what Tehran calls the Persian Gulf and Riyadh calls the Arabian Gulf.

Being-against

The problem is not just that Hardt/Negri pluck as they please from textual sources and contemporary history. The problem is the politics they aim to embellish by doing so. Compare their linkage of postmoderns to fundamentalists with comments Georg Lukács made in a letter to Paul Ernst. Both men had been romantic anticapitalists before World War I, and then parted political ways. Lukács, critic and philosopher, became a Bolshevik; Ernst, playwright and poet, became a nationalist conservative. The former believed that he had found the messiah class, the vehicle through which life and history—Life and History—would be made whole. The latter remained an anti-capitalist and longed for an imaginary world—Golden and Organic—that was uncontaminated by the rise of commercial barbarism. “However much our ideas may differ,” Lukács wrote to him in the 1920s, “discussion is possible so long as our judgments of capitalism are similar. I believe that you are mistaken on nearly every question, but you are not on the other side of the barricades.”⁷

As Leninists and conservative nationalists were, despite their differing ideas, on the same side of the barricades against capitalism, so, it seems, postmoderns and fundamentalists respond in concert, despite antithetical discourses, to what Hardt/Negri call “Empire.” Empire is for them a new paradigm that issues from modernity’s transfiguration into postmodernity. It leaves behind sovereign states, nations, and imperialism, and has no “center.” So it “is not American,” even if the United States retains a privileged position

within it. Yet it is a “systemic totality,” write Hardt/Negri, whose thinking draws from postmodernist philosopher Gilles Deleuze and systems theorist Niklas Luhmann. Deleuze advocated “systematic” metaphysical thinking, in contrast to most postmodernists, who oppose “grand narratives” and speak of a “fragmented” universe. But a Deleuzian system has no essence, no grounding principle. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Félix Guattari insisted that our lives are machines—“real ones, not figurative ones; machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections.” If you link Deleuze’s vision to Luhmann’s notion of “autopoiesis,” that is, of a self-producing and self-referential system of communication, then the “fundamental principle” of the Hardt/Negri “totality” begins to take its somewhat indeterminate shape: in Empire, “power has no actual and localizable terrain or center. Imperial power is distributed in networks through mobilized and articulated mechanisms of control.” And so revolt will have to be through those mechanisms, decentered, everywhere.

Communication is now “the central element that establishes the relations of production.” Our deregulated, “informatized” world reproduces itself “immaterially.” What Foucault called “disciplinary society,” a product of modernity, becomes, according to Hardt/Negri, a “society of control,” of “biopower” in postmodern Empire. In disciplinary society, social “apparatuses,” ranging from prisons to asylums to clinics, impose standards of normality and deviance. “The *police* includes everything,” as Foucault once wrote. “There is no substantial difference between prison and the rest of life,” said Negri in a 1998 interview, just before he went to jail in Italy on (very arguable) charges, from several years earlier, of inciting political violence.⁸ The New Deal embodied “the highest form of *disciplinary* government,” we read in *Empire*, because the entire society, a “factory-society,” was “subsumed under the command of capital and the state.” The Soviet Union, also a “factory-society,” failed because it was unable to transcend “disciplinary governability.” Still, Hardt/Negri chastise cold war ideology for obscuring the “ex-

tremely strong instances of creativity and freedom” in Soviet history. Indeed, virtually all the books discussing totalitarianism can be “thrown away without hesitation.”

Yet the Empire in which we live, as they characterize it, is in significant ways a postmodern 1984. It is a world of doublethink, a “society of control” in which the “mechanisms of command” pretend to be democratic when they actually generalize “disciplinarity” throughout our “brains and bodies.” Biopower “regulates social life from its interior.” Instead of Big Brother’s party, “a globalized . . . machine” that is “economic-industrial-communicative” commands “the entire life of the population.” They conclude, and surely Orwell’s O’Brien would concur, that “truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will.”

ONE NEED NOT be a philosophical foundationalist—a believer in ahistorical verities—to find in this last formula the autopoietic short circuit through which anti-foundationalism and fundamentalism connect. All postmodern history is the history of conflicting truth-producers, and there seems to be no reality check on any of them. For Hardt/Negri, the important truth is what You Are Against. Or perhaps, the important truth is simply that You Are Against—because they don’t seem to appreciate that nobody is more foundationalist than a fundamentalist. As long as You Are Against, the basis doesn’t seem to matter. It doesn’t matter that contemporary Muslim fundamentalists believe, in Tibi’s words, that “modern knowledge ought to be Islamicized” or, more properly, re-Islamicized, because they imagine that all science comes, finally, from Islam.⁹ What matters for Hardt/Negri is “Being-against.” It is “the essential key to every active political position in the world.” The “lived experience of the global multitude” is animated by it “at the most basic and elemental level.”

This is a quasi-Heideggerian riff, although the authors don’t say so. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger formulated the phrase “Being-with” (*Mitsein*) to describe how an individual can lose his Self in “the Others,” that is, how an individual can become “inauthentic” by “falling”

into the mass. Hardt/Negri recognize that the proletariat, in the old Marxist sense, won't be a messiah class. But they have a postmodern *tiers-mondiste* substitute. They hope that the "global multitude" will forge a new, liberating, collective force through "Being-against," and especially through "Being-against" Empire.

"Being-against" allows Hardt/Negri to bring together under the same rubric Chiapas, fundamentalism, and Tiananmen Square. Participants in the Los Angeles riots of 1992 and the intifada may not realize it—one might say that they may have only local focus rather than decentered global consciousness—but they are all refusing "the post-Fordist regime of social control." These risings, regardless of their content, are postmodern and potentially liberating. Everyone who is authentically "against" is on the same side of the barricades. Edward Said is lauded at one point in *Empire* for complaining that "Orientalists" homogenize the "Orient." That is, most Western scholars don't examine "the Orient" empirically but as an object created by their own prejudiced discourses. But because Hardt/Negri don't acknowledge that Said does this himself when he addresses the Middle East, one hardly expects them to recognize that they too are relentless homogenizers when they write of "Being-against." In the end, one senses that Hardt/Negri's concern is ontological tantrum rather than alternative politics. And if you don't know that you are really against the world market—if, say, you are a Palestinian who has lived in misery for decades in a Gaza refugee camp and you don't grasp that post-Fordism is your real problem—well . . . Hardt/Negri know for you.

LUCIEN GOLDMANN, a socialist humanist whose work was eclipsed by postmodernism, once noted how Lukács and Heidegger rallied to dictators, respectively to Stalin and Hitler, in the belief that they, as theorists, grasped the meaning of the "totality" better than their political leaders.¹⁰ One finds, I think, a similar hubris in Hardt/Negri, not just in their discussions of fundamentalism and of everyone who is "against," but in their strident, oracular tones. They write as if nothing ever went awry in the name of "the left" or "authenticity." A kindred tone could be

discerned in part of the intellectual left after September 11—among those whose first impulse was not to mourn murdered innocents, but to explain how this event (yes, yes, an unfortunate event) demonstrated how they were always right about everything.

The Good, the Bad, and the Modern

Actually, Hardt and Negri do think that something has been wrong on the left, and you find it not just in what they write; you hear it in their voice. It is an understanding, even empathetic voice when they discuss fundamentalists, however "antithetical" the discourse is to their own. But it is contemptuous when they speak of noncommunist socialists. "Liberal and socialist big government," they protest, brought great "repression and destruction of humanity." Liberalism and socialism were the two great "ideologies" of modernity's "mature phase," when "immanence" first lost out to "transcendence."

Early Renaissance humanism, according to this grand narrative, was a good thing because it unleashed "immanent"—that is, creative, this-worldly, "revolutionary"—forces. But these forces of good modernity also gave rise to the Reformation and religious wars. Order was then reestablished by a new "transcendental" power, the "sovereignty machine." More simply, the modern state, defined by its capacity to make and enforce law, represents "counter-revolution" to Hardt/Negri. "Thermidor" was revealed particularly by the "miserable and humiliating peace" that ended the Thirty Years War. The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 established the modern state system and confirmed the sixteenth-century principle "*cuius regio, eius religio*" (he who rules a domain may impose his religion on it). "Even religion became the ruler's property," they complain. It was "subordinated to the territorial control of the sovereign." From here bleaker developments ensue. The concept of the nation emerges, little more than a reinvention of "the patrimonial body of the monarchic state," except that the "feudal order of subject yielded to the disciplinary order of the citizen." National identity was indissolubly linked to "the construction of an absolute racial difference," and so, bad modernization also gives us Eurocentrism

and (modern) imperialism.

Worse still, it gives us the Enlightenment as personified by Immanuel Kant. For Hardt/Negri, Kantian “transcendental” rationalism is “the definitive liquidation of the humanist revolution.” In simpler terms, Kant proposed that we would know the world only as a chaos of sensations if we did not share an a priori cognitive structure that deploys concepts. This is why we can communicate rationally with one another and speak of the world as law-like. It is also why Kantianism is a species of liberal universalism; reasonable law comes from within all of us. But for Hardt/Negri, if you connect Kant’s law within to law imposed from outside (by the “sovereignty machine”), liberal modernity becomes virtually totalitarian. Kantianism denies “every form of immediacy” and “immanence,” write Hardt/Negri. So “postmodernists continually return to the lingering influence of the Enlightenment as the source of domination.” (For postmodernists, it seems, the Enlightenment is the *Jahilliya* of the West.) And if Enlightenment universalism provides an ideological justification of bad modernity, John Rawls’s social liberalism, which owes a good deal to Kantian rationalism, does likewise on behalf of Empire.

FOR MOST READERS, Rawls’s *Theory of Justice* is a thought experiment in which people who differ in social advantages and natural capacities negotiate basic principles of justice for a society. They do this under an imaginary “veil of ignorance,” which conceals from them knowledge of their own social situation or abilities (their particularities). This enables them to bargain “fairly,” that is, solely on the basis of a common human rationality and without the intrusion of self-interested prejudices. Deliberations, Rawls proposed, would arrive finally at a consensus on political liberalism and the idea that inequalities are justifiable only when they can be shown to benefit the least advantaged members of society. For Hardt/Negri, the veil is really an ideological mask. After all, they expect “Being-against” to bind the multitude. Rawls’s co-citizens are linked through a common human rationality, and all good postmodernists know that rationality must entail some trick of domina-

tion. So Hardt/Negri tell us that “imperial command” needs an “inclusive” moment. By blinding us to differences, “a veil of ignorance prepares a universal acceptance” of Empire’s “totality,” which runs on its own logic like a “high tech machine.” This system must also obliterate challenges; this is why there are Gulf Wars. And nongovernmental organizations—especially human rights groups like Amnesty International, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, or Oxfam—are “moral police” whose “moral interventionism” often “prepares the stage” for military intervention.

With some detwisting, we see how Hardt/Negri’s narrative conveys their hostility to liberalism and socialism. The Renaissance was surely a great force of intellectual emancipation, but it hardly represented “the triumph of secularism,” as they characterize it. It contributed to secularism mainly by legitimating competing authorities (more specifically, the Ancients alongside the Church), but most Renaissance intellectuals assumed that their humanism didn’t contradict their Christianity. Moreover, Europe did not become what historian R.I. Moore calls “a persecuting society” when Bad Modernity took shape as the sovereign state. It did so in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—before “modernity”—during what is sometimes designated “the twelfth century Renaissance.” A basic change then took place when “deliberate and socially sanctioned violence began to be directed *through established governmental, judicial and social institutions* against groups of people”—heretics, Jews, lepers, “sodomites,” others—“defined by general characteristics such as race, religion or way of life and . . . membership of such groups in itself came to be regarded as justifying these attacks.”¹¹

Hardt/Negri are so eager to denounce Eurocentrism that they fail to perceive how pre-modern prejudice against Europe’s internal Others could translate into intolerance among Christians, and then into negation of external Others. (No wonder that the Holocaust appears in their account to be little more than a detail of modernity.) Hardt/Negri are interested in “immanence,” not tolerance. Otherwise, they might have understood that the principle of “*cuius regio, eius religio*” in both the Peace

of Augsburg (1555) and the Treaty of Westphalia, meant acceptance of multiconfessionalism in place of bloody efforts to impose religious uniformity across the continent. To say that a prince could impose his religion within his territories meant in the context of the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries that Europeans were resigning themselves to difference, that is, to accepting Catholicism and Protestantism along side one another. (In fact, Westphalia went beyond Augsburg by maintaining, albeit in a limited way, that subjects of minority religions in a principedom should have civil protections.)

IT IS TRUE that Westphalia didn't establish what Hardt/Negri want—postmodern “hybridity.” But, frankly, postmodern hybridity wasn't much of an option at the time. What was possible was a pragmatic step toward European pluralism, which was considerably less miserable than holy warriors slaughtering each other. This step required sovereign states stationed above competing religions. These states, even when absolutist in character, did not represent the “Thermidor” of Renaissance humanism; they were a precondition of pluralistic societies in which competing narratives could co-exist. The concept of the nation did not simply reinvent “the patrimonial body of the monarchic state.” It democratized it by suggesting that a political community of equal citizens might displace realms composed of royal subjects.

This did require “difference” among republics or nations, because it presumed self-government, rather than mobilization of a global “multitude.” But self-government and nationalism (the latter was a left-wing term in the early nineteenth century) entail both inclusive and exclusive, democratizing, and “Other”-creating dimensions. Liberals and social democrats largely accepted the resulting framework, that is, the necessity of bounded political communities. This, for Hardt/Negri, is their original sin. How could anyone see both positive and negative dimensions of, say, the Enlightenment or the liberal democratic state? Social reformism within a liberal democratic framework is apparently just one more snare in the mechanism of domination. Globalization,

Hardt/Negri believe, harbors the alternative.

Immanence in Our Time?

“Let a thousand machines of life, art, solidarity, and action sweep away the stupid and sclerotic arrogance of the old organizations,” wrote Guattari and Negri in an essay entitled “Communists like Us.” In *Empire* we learn that Bad Postmodernity can be replaced by Good Postmodernity thanks to Being-against. “Globalization must be met with counterglobalization, Empire with counter-Empire.” This is possible because “the body of the multitude can configure itself as a telos.” This telos is “theurgical,”—which means, says my dictionary, that divine agency is at work. In their quest for counter-Empire, which they also call “the earthly city of the multitude,” Hardt/Negri seem to enter their own realm of political spirituality. “The poor is god on earth,” they tell us, “there is World Poverty, but there is above all World Possibility, and only the poor is capable of this.”

Hardt/Negri turn for inspiration to Saint Augustine. He saw, in their words, that “no limited community could succeed and provide an alternative to [decaying, Roman] imperial rule; only a universal, catholic community bringing together all populations and all languages in a common journey could accomplish this.” They go on to explain that “Our pilgrimage on earth, . . . in contrast to Augustine's, has no transcendent telos beyond; it is and remains absolutely immanent. Its continuous movement, gathering aliens in community, making this world its home, is both means and end, or rather a means without end.” The syndicalism—the “perpetual movement”—of the Industrial Workers of the World at the turn of the twentieth century was “an immanent pilgrimage.” It embodied “the great Augustinian project of modern times.”

And it is a postmodern project too. In our times Being-against will release the multitude's “desire” so that “technologies and production” may be directed “towards its [the multitude's] own joy and its own increase in power.” The Internet is one such technology because it is a “nonhierarchical and noncentered network structure”—a “rhizome” in Deleuzese. Because they see human beings as “desiring” machines,

mechanical and organic images always seem to merge for Hardt/Negri. In a telling metaphor, they provide what might be called “the capillary theory” of postmodern change. Capillaries are small vessels between the terminations of arteries and the starts of veins, that is, between the blood channels from and to the heart. Hardt/Negri, having described nongovernmental organizations as moral police early in *Empire*, go on, later in the book, to characterize them as “the capillary ends of the contemporary networks of power.” In other words, the “universal moral call” of these NGOs might, dialectically, usher along a reversal of biopower’s direction.

This reversal is reminiscent of the most precarious moment in Marx’s political thought—when he imagined that a proletarian state that centralized dominion over economic life (in the first phase of communism) would lead dialectically to a stateless society (in the second, classless phase of communism). The goal of postmodern dialectical reversal is a world of deterritorialized movements, rhizomes—and Hardt/Negri believe it is inscribed in the present. Postmodern Empire “presents us, alongside the machine of command, with an alternative: the set of all the exploited and subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them. At this point, then, as Augustine says, our task is to discuss, to the best of our powers, ‘the rise, the power, and the destined ends of the two cities . . . which we find . . . interwoven . . . and mingled with one another.’”

But here again, as soon as their political spirituality is asserted, the language (and ideas) become fungible. Read Augustine and you will find that there can be no “Augustinian project” in Hardt/Negri’s sense. Augustine believed that “the whole mass of the human race is condemned” to “punishment without end” because of Original Sin. He did not believe that humanity is composed of pilgrims bound for a transcendent telos. His pilgrims are the tiny minority who are saved by “unmerited” grace. Nothing they do gains it; those in the Earthly City do not know if they have it or if they will be separated from the damned, who are bound in the opposite direction from God’s City. So when Augustine says that the “destined ends”

of the two cities intermingl^e in our world, his assumptions are the opposite of those of Hardt/Negri. Humanity does not have a common journey, and utopia is given from above to a very limited few in the afterlife. If you take Augustinian premises seriously, you cannot reach Wobbly conclusions. It would be like proposing that Muslim fundamentalism is a postmodern phenomenon.

AND WHAT IF a “thousand machines of life, art, solidarity, and action” don’t bloom? What if no General Strike of the multitude makes the Earthly City divine? This was, after all, Lenin’s problem. He solved it by placing the Vanguard Party, with its “scientific” grasp of history, between the two cities. Hardt/Negri slide into postmodern Bolshevism. They want “Being-against” to become, dialectically, politically spiritual immanence, but they must know that only postmodern intellectuals will digest their discourse. After all, their theory of revolutionary communication explains that the theurgical telos of the desirous multitude of decentered Empire will be realized joyously as its Being-against is configured rhizomatically. If you are one of the multitude and this doesn’t quite explain your world to you, well, not everyone grasped Lenin’s *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*.

And so Hardt/Negri tell us that it is the “militant” who “best expresses the life of the multitude.” This militant is personified not only by the “liberatory” combatants and intellectuals of the last century, but more important—this would appear to be Hardt/Negri’s version of *Salafiyyah*—by St. Francis of Assisi. “Once again in post-modernity we find ourselves in Francis’s situation, posing against the misery of power the joy of being. This is a revolution that no power will control—because biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist.”

Or is it a grand Deleuzion? Consider what “Being-against” should be for, according to Hardt/Negri. First, “global citizenship.” But when they define this, it turns into postmodern singsong: “The multitude must be able to decide if, when, and where it moves.” Is the mul-

titude an “it”? Or human beings? Only an “it” can remain in “perpetual movement,” as in Hardt/Negri’s fantasy of the Augustinian Pilgrimage of the Wobblies. The word “multitude” in *Empire* doesn’t embody postmodern humanism; it represents the congealed “desire” of its authors. After all, most human beings need moments and places no less than metamorphoses. Palestinians don’t want perpetual motion; they want sovereignty (like the Zionists). Poor migrants in our globalizing world don’t pursue “continuous movement” as an end in itself; they seek places in which to live decent and secure lives. Only capital pursuing profits can live in relentless movement. (Well, perhaps cosmopolitan intellectuals can too when they chase conferences and international celebrity. But usually they also want—and need—the security of tenure.)

The two other demands championed by Hardt/Negri are a guaranteed social wage for all and the “reapportionment” of the means of production. These are hardly postmodern demands—they are among the oldest in the history of the left. How to realize them today? On this subject Hardt/Negri have little to tell us. Like Foucault, they search for an art of not being governed. They want the multitude to be a “constituent power” at the “site of ontological constitution.” No wonder that the postmodern left hasn’t won a real political battle anywhere.

WHY, THEN, IS *Empire* in such vogue? One reason is that it aims to fill an empty space on the left. The world did change dramatically in the last quarter century due to the revolutions in technology and communications, the progress of neoliberal globalization, and the end of the cold war. The so-

cial democratic left in Europe (and Bill Clinton in the United States) responded with talk of a “third way” that was mostly devoid of social imagination. This third way simply became a way of adjustment, the acceptance of “the end of history.” But if you exit history, someone else is likely to barge in. Social democratic parties sat in governments across much of Europe in the 1990s—and adjusted. Now their adjustment is being repudiated in election after election. The worrisome political strength of the populist right is one consequence.

The popularity of *Empire*, with its combination of political spirituality and sing-song *tiers-mondisme*, is another. While social democracy stutters, postmodernism chants. But what if the poor do not incarnate World Possibility or the god of the Earthly City? What if the multitude is just suffering human beings? Then the responsibility of the left is to imagine global, regional, national, and local reforms that will enable these human beings to take political, social, and economic life into their own hands—rather than make them the means of (decentered) intellectual fantasy. Then perhaps it would be better for the left to speak of human beings as if they were ends in themselves rather than “desiring machines.” Perhaps it is not an accident but a “symptom” that “biopower,” “multitude,” and “rhizome” appear in *Empire*’s index but “democracy” does not. The “biopolitics” of *Empire* recalls Karl Kraus’s characterization of psychoanalysis: part of the ailment it professes to cure. ●

MITCHELL COHEN is co-editor of *Dissent* and professor of political theory at Baruch College of the City University of New York. He wishes to thank Michael Walzer and Richard Wolin for helpful comments on drafts of this article.

1. On Foucault and Iran in English, see especially, Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 281-295; James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (Simon and Schuster, 1993), pp. 306-324; and Foucault’s essays “Open Letter to Mehdi Bazargan” and “Useless to Revolt?”, in Michel Foucault, *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, Vol 3* (The New Press, 2000).

2. Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 18-19.

3. For Salah’s comments, see Jalal Bana, “Among the

Believers,” *Ha’aretz* (October 26, 2001); for Yassin, see Zvi Bar’el, “Make Children not War,” *Ha’aretz* (March 14, 2002).

4. Bassam Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics* (Palgrave, 2001), p. 15.

5. See Albert Hourani’s classic study *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Oxford University Press, 1970).

6. I draw in part from Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Anchor Books, 1968), esp. pp. 81-93 and Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (University of Texas Press, 1982), esp. 47-49 and 81-102.

7. See Michel Löwy, *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism* (New Left Books, 1979), p. 46.

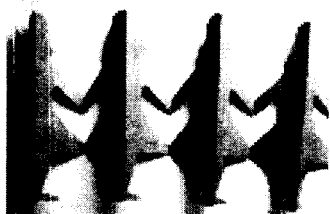
8. Negri, a prominent intellectual figure in the Italian far left, spent several years in Parisian exile to avoid jail. He returned to Italy under a special arrangement which allows him to be in prison only in the evenings. The interview is in a video, "*Retour vers le futur*," which was also published in book form as *Exil* (L'Œil Ouvert, 1998). Negri's view of prison might be compared usefully with his (and Hardt's) characterization in *Empire* of the last years of Louis Althusser's life as "his period of seclusion."

Althusser strangled his wife and then spent a decade in and out of mental hospitals.

9. Tibi, pp. 11-13.

10. Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács et Heidegger*, Youssef Ishaghpour, ed. (Denoël/Gonthier, 1973), pp. 76-79.

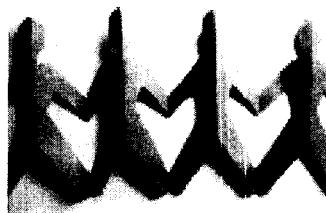
11. See R.I. Moore's *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Blackwell, 1992), pp. 4-5, and pp. 153-53. This book is clearly influenced by Foucault's methods but with a much surer grasp of history than that of most Foucauldians.



**Add dimension to
your sociological
research**

**sociological
abstracts**

Comprehensive, cost-effective, timely



Abstracts of articles, books, and conference papers from nearly 2,500 journals published in 35 countries; citations of relevant dissertations as well as books and other media.

Available in print or electronically through the Internet Database Service from Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (www.csa.com).

Contact sales@csa.com for trial Internet access or a sample issue.

sociological abstracts

Published by CSA



Cambridge Scientific Abstracts

7200 Wisconsin Avenue

Bethesda, Maryland 20814 USA

Tel: +1 301-961-6700

Fax: +1 301-961-6720

E-Mail: sales@csa.com

Web: www.csa.com

Rethinking the Cultural Cold War

Jeffrey C. Isaac

FRANCES STONOR SAUNDERS'S *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters** is a widely discussed retrospective on post-Second World War liberalism that raises important questions about the relationships between intellectuals and political power. Obsessed with the hypocrisies of liberalism, its focus is neither the cold war nor U.S. foreign policy. Its focus is the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in promoting post-war anticommunist liberalism. Saunders argues that the world of arts and letters in the so-called "Western" zone of influence was something other than it seemed to its inhabitants. Although Western liberal writers, artists, and performers extolled the virtues of the open society, they were in fact serving as foot soldiers of American foreign policy, organized and covertly supported by the CIA. Most of Saunders's attention is focused on the Congress for Cultural Freedom, a cosmopolitan network that organized many of the most important conferences and publications in the postwar period, whose CIA cover was blown only in 1967, in a series of explosive revelations.

Saunders's book represents an updated version of the New Left revisionism about the cold war pioneered by such writers as Christopher Lasch, Gabriel Kolko, and Richard Barnett. But, written in the wake of the Gulf War, NATO intervention in the Balkans, and the global triumph of McDonald's, Starbucks, Nike, and "free market values," it is not simply another historical account of the cold war but also an intervention in current political controversies. The book has been celebrated by many left writers, in reviews in the *Nation*, *Monthly Re-*

view, and elsewhere, and disparaged by neoconservatives in *The American Spectator* and the *National Interest*. The debate about the book has been stark. On one side are those who embrace Saunders's caustic account not simply of the CIA but of anticommunist liberalism in general; on the other are those who embrace anticommunism and celebrate its 1989 triumph as a vindication of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Discussions of the book have the flavor of broader historical debates about "which side were you on?" This is no surprise; Saunders's intention was to promote just such a debate.

Like all debunkers, she performs a valuable service, revealing, in painful and sometimes excruciating detail, many of the foibles, miscalculations, and outright deceptions of cold war liberalism. Writing against the grain of post-1989 liberal self-satisfaction, she identifies the intellectual and political narrowing that helped to buttress anticommunist liberalism and to constrain the development of alternatives to it. Nonetheless, *The Cultural Cold War* is a deeply flawed book. It fails to grapple in a serious way with the *ideas* that were the chief currency of those it purports to study. Its arguments are lacking in nuance and are often in tension with the information its narrative provides. It is too prosecutorial in tone, too shrill in its historical judgments. And most important, it is inattentive to the importance of liberal values and institutions and to the need to defend them when they are threatened, an inattentiveness particularly glaring in the aftermath of September 11.

The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters

The watchwords of post-Second World War liberalism were "intellectual freedom" and "open society." Saunders's book recounts how these ideas were mobilized, funded, and promoted by an elaborate covert operation orches-

*New Press, 2000.

trated by the Central Intelligence Agency. In the name of freedom from the state, an intellectual consensus was thus shaped by the institutions of the American national security apparatus. Although key decisions were made in Washington, D.C., and Langley, Virginia, the principal site of the activity reported by Saunders was cold war Europe, centered in Paris and Berlin. Saunders's story begins in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, with individuals and organizations associated with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—the forerunner of the CIA—the U.S. High Command in Germany, and the State Department. Responding to what Saunders describes as a “Soviet offensive” in Europe, a small group of individuals saw the need for an American-led ideological “counteroffensive.”

THE Congress for Cultural Freedom was the principal vehicle of this counteroffensive. Inaugurated by a heavily publicized conference in Berlin in 1950, the Congress was a network of intellectuals, national affiliates, and publications organized by the newly formed CIA under the direction of Allen Dulles, Frank Wisner, and Tom Braden. The brainchild of such staunch anticommunist intellectuals as Arthur Koestler, James Burnham, and Melvin Lasky, the Berlin Conference on Cultural Freedom and the Congress that was its outcome were committed to countering Soviet cultural policy in Europe and to defending the institutions of liberal, capitalist democracy. The central figure in Saunders's account is Michael Josselson, an Estonian-born Jewish intellectual who served in Berlin after the war as a cultural affairs officer of the U.S. Military Government and later as a public affairs officer of the State Department and the U.S. High Commission. Josselson was designated by the CIA as the perfect man to lead the Congress, and, for almost twenty years, he served as its executive director and chief strategist. Moving between Paris, Brussels, London, Berlin, New York, and Washington, Josselson coordinated Congress activities, navigating skillfully between the broad ideological mandates of the CIA and the diverse commitments of the intellectuals whose work the Congress sought to promote. The list of those who fig-

ure prominently in this story, as participants and leaders of the Congress, includes Isaiah Berlin, Raymond Aron, Stephen Spender, Ignazio Silone, Nicola Chiaromonte, Nicolas Nabakov, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Sidney Hook, Mary McCarthy, Dwight Macdonald, Daniel Bell, Irving Kristol, and James Burnham. The list of those who participated in Congress conferences and published in Congress outlets was even more extensive, including virtually everyone who was anyone in Western arts and letters.

The Congress organized a series of major conferences, concerts, and art exhibits in Europe at the height of the cold war. Most important, it published numerous books and some of the most important periodicals of the post-war period, including *Der Monat* (Germany), *Tempo Presente* (Italy), *Preuves* (France), *Science and Freedom* (Britain), *Quadrant* (Australia), *Quest* (India), *Transition* (Uganda), and *Soviet Survey* (a chronicle of Soviet and Eastern European affairs). Its most influential publication was *Encounter*, edited by Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol in London. Along with the CIA, the Congress also helped distribute such independently published periodicals as *Partisan Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Sewanee Review*, *Poetry*, *Daedalus*, and the *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Where there was high intellectual, literary, and artistic culture in the West, there was the Congress, which sought to showcase Western culture and demonstrate its superiority to Soviet arts and letters. The Congress was emphatically committed to liberal values. Precisely because of this, it was actively and adamantly anticommunist. And because it saw the United States as the principal bulwark against communism, it was also emphatically pro-American. Indeed, if one of its primary purposes was to support European anticommunist liberals, the other was to demonstrate to a skeptical European public the virtues of American culture and politics. In many ways the Congress was the intellectual equivalent of the Marshall Plan.

It is this anticommunist mobilization that is Saunders's main theme. She considers it ironic, and hypocritical, that intellectuals so concerned with defending freedom and oppos-

ing state oppression were so willing to identify with the geopolitical strategies of the United States. The machinations of the CIA in covertly founding, financing, and seeking to influence such intellectual efforts is one side of this. The credulity of so many intellectuals, and their inclination to go along with activities clearly supported by American policy—whether they were aware of CIA involvement or not (and Saunders concedes that most of them were not)—is the other, even more damning side as far as she is concerned. A good part of the book is taken up with stories of CIA intrigue and money laundering.

Along the way specific instances of intellectual corruption are recounted: the role of the CIA in providing covert support for avowedly independent anticommunist magazines such as *Partisan Review* and the *New Leader*; CIA covert involvement with the Museum of Modern Art in promoting Jackson Pollack and Abstract Expressionism in the European art world; CIA efforts to influence the production of Hollywood films (Saunders notes that these efforts had no direct tie to the Congress); and the attempt of the CIA to promote Gaitskellism—a centrist version of social democracy hospitable to NATO—within the British Labour Party. Most notoriously, perhaps, there was the decision of the editors of *Encounter*—under pressure from the Paris office of the Congress, which was itself under pressure from Washington—to reject a 1958 essay by Dwight Macdonald, “America, America,” which was harshly critical of American culture and politics. (In fact, the editors insisted on substantial revisions, which Macdonald, understandably offended, declined to make. The piece was published instead in *Dissent*; later, a version also appeared in *Tempo Presente*.)

For Saunders, these stories converge in a single narrative about how the CIA corrupted the world of arts and letters during the early years of the cold war, conscripting liberal intellectuals in the battle against communism at the cost of their independence and critical function, causing them, in the words of Michael Rogin, to trade in “their pariah status [and] act as organic intellectuals of the national security state.”¹

What Is Wrong with the Argument?

The Cultural Cold War is successful as a form of debunking. There was a seamy side to the Congress and its various initiatives, and Saunders exposes it. On an even deeper level, there can be no doubt that their passionate opposition to Soviet communism led many cold war liberal intellectuals to sacrifice their critical faculties, to force issues into the straitjacket of bipolar thinking and ignore inconvenient facts about the side they had chosen. Nonetheless, as a work of history and political commentary, Saunders’s book is very weak. Although she offers gripping accounts of classified CIA memos, she rarely discusses ideas and publications. She is, after all, writing about intellectuals and accusing them of a *trahison des clercs*, but her mode of analysis could apply just as easily to carpenters or accountants as to writers and artists. The intellectual content of cold war liberalism receives almost no treatment in her book. The important collection *The God That Failed*, for example, gets four pages of discussion, limited to details of the book’s publication (its editor, Richard Crossman, had worked in wartime intelligence and its publisher later published a book by Allen Dulles). For her, the book was a “sham,” a piece of CIA propaganda. But she spends not a single word analyzing, even critically, the essays that Ignazio Silone, André Gide, Richard Wright, Arthur Koestler, Louis Fischer, and Stephen Spender contributed to the volume, all powerful accounts of Stalinist tyranny and terror. As a consequence, what she says about the book is simply silly.

A brief discussion of George Orwell fails in the same way: not a word about his arguments and ideas.² Saunders’s refusal to discuss ideas no doubt reflects her hostility toward her anticommunist subjects. But at a deeper level she makes one wonder whether she can deal in the intellectual currency of her subjects. She devotes a paragraph, for example, to discussing Reinhold Niebuhr’s influence on cold war liberalism, commenting, strangely, that “for members of that [liberal] elite, Niebuhr was, of course, a congenial authority figure. Martin Luther King, on the other hand, claimed to have learned from him the “‘potential for evil.’” Saunders doesn’t understand that Niebuhr was

an intellectual authority for King as well, and that his ideas about power and evil were seminal for King and figures such as Schlesinger, Jr., for similar reasons. Her sensationalist agenda leaves little room for them.

The book fails not simply as intellectual history but as any kind of history. Saunders's subjects seem stuck in time. They are anticommunist liberals. How they became anticommunists or how the character of their anticommunism or their liberalism changed over time are matters of indifference. The only story of interest to her is the story of how the CIA sought covertly to manipulate intellectual life and how its cover was blown. Historical events are for Saunders simply precipitants of anticommunist statements on the part of Congress associates or CIA officials. These events never appear as occasions for thought or argument on the part of liberal intellectuals or as watershed moments of crisis or change. If there is any historical narrative here beyond anticommunism as an eternal recurrence, it is what I would call a neoconservative teleology. Saunders believes that the logic of anticommunism in general and Congress ideology in particular leads only to Reaganism, that the true face of cold war liberalism is the face of Sidney Hook or Irving Kristol. There is an interesting history to be told of the sixties implosion of cold war liberalism in America and of the various outcomes of this implosion, only one of which was neoconservatism. Such a history would require an account of the complex trajectory of ideas that for Saunders seem all the same; it would reveal the multiple legacies of her subjects. But Saunders has a preconceived stereotype of an anticommunist liberal, and nothing else interests her.

This narrowness makes it impossible for her to take her subjects seriously as public intellectuals who became, for intelligible reasons worth thinking about, anticommunist and liberal. The book's closing paragraph reveals its fundamental problem: "The same people who read Dante and went to Yale and were educated in civic virtue," Saunders writes, "recruited Nazis, manipulated the outcomes of democratic elections, gave LSD to unwitting subjects, opened the mail of thousands of American citizens, overthrew governments, sup-

ported dictatorships, plotted assassinations, and engineered the Bay of Pigs disaster. 'In the name of what?' asked one critic. 'Not civic virtue, but empire.'" This is the culminating indictment that Saunders has supposedly prepared in her four hundred and some pages. But it takes only a moment of reflection to realize that the people to whom this sentence refers are not the people discussed in most of the book. It was not Silone or Spender or even Hook or Kristol who went to Yale or recruited Nazis or masterminded CIA covert operations in Guatemala or Vietnam or Chile. Even Josselson, who unlike the intellectuals named above was on the CIA payroll as director of the Congress, was about as far removed from such activities as the pacifist A.J. Muste. Allen Dulles, Richard Helms, and others ran the CIA. It is *their* activities that are the real focus of this book. In a perverse way, the book is not really about the Congress or about anti-communist liberalism at all; it is about the CIA and the activities of liberal intellectuals seen *from the point of view of the CIA*.

IF THE CIA viewed the Congress and its affiliates as its witting or unwitting accomplices, then for Saunders that is what they must have been. If from the standpoint of the CIA, intellectual subtleties and the complicated motives of writers and artists were irrelevant, then for Saunders they are irrelevant. Saunders does not even consider the possibility that although the CIA is clearly an important part of the story of "the cultural cold war," it is not the whole of the story—except in the eyes of the agency's own megalomaniacal leaders.

This is the most serious flaw in the book. And it makes Saunders completely unable to give a plausible account of the Europeans, including Josselson, who make up such an important part of this story. The Congress was a trans-Atlantic umbrella organization. Its central theater of activity was Europe, and many of its most important members were European intellectuals who had their own reasons, drawn from vivid personal experience, for being passionately anticommunist. Many were themselves former communists who had experienced Party hypocrisy, deceit, or worse, and

who had concluded that the “god” had failed. Many were noncommunist leftists or liberals for whom European communism had proved itself a disaster: in Barcelona in 1936, in Moscow in 1938, in Munich in 1939, in Berlin in 1945, in Prague in 1948 (on this score Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* remains a classic; I wish that Saunders had deigned to read it). Among these intellectuals there were many important differences of opinion. But what they shared above all was that they were *Europeans* who had experienced betrayal, displacement, forced exile, and fear for their lives.³ The CIA’s reasons for supporting the Congress were not the reasons of the intellectuals who joined it. The European experience of these intellectuals is absolutely central to understanding why anti-communism loomed so large for them. It is also central to understanding the difficulties many of them had in recognizing the counterrevolutionary role being played by American foreign policy in the newly labeled “third world.” For good and ill, they were Eurocentrist. Any serious account of the topics broached in Saunders’s book would have to deal with what happened in Europe in their lifetime. Saunders has nothing to say about this.

I HAVE THUS far presented Saunders as most readers have read her: providing a clear argument about the complicity and corruption of anticommunist liberal intellectuals. There are strong grounds for this reading, particularly in the way she frames her narrative at the beginning and end. But Saunders is also conflicted and more than a bit inconsistent in her overall evaluation of cold war liberalism. Much of the book’s force (as well as its fundamental weakness) derives from her claim that “the cultural Cold War... was all a fiction, a fabricated reality,” a projection of liberal anxieties and liberal will to power. But on numerous occasions—at least fifteen by my count—she indicates, though always in passing, that “freedom of any kind certainly wasn’t on the agenda in the Soviet Union, where those writers and intellectuals who were not sent to the gulags were lassoed into serving the interests of the state,” and that a Soviet “offensive” existed in Europe. Saunders never draws the obvious conclusion: perhaps Congress intellectuals were

concerned with something very real, the brutality and aggressiveness of Stalinism; perhaps their struggle was not a simple fabrication of their own ideology.

This is strange, because Saunders’s book provides the basis for a different, more nuanced account than the simpleminded, anti-liberal story she seems wedded to—and for which she has been lauded by some friendly reviewers on the left. Such a nuanced account would highlight the following points:

1. Contrary to the idea that anticommunist liberals toed a single line as “organic intellectuals of the national security state,” there were serious disagreements within the Congress and even within the American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF), which was the most doctrinaire Congress affiliate. These disagreements existed from the very inception of the Congress at the 1950 Berlin Conference, where, as Saunders herself points out, Silone engaged Koestler in a debate about the extremity of his anticommunist opinions. This debate, and others like it, was described in a published review (by another participant, Hugh Trevor-Roper) that was highly critical of the Koestler line (also articulated in Berlin by Franz Borkenau, Sidney Hook, and James Burnham). Trevor-Roper, speaking for many anticommunist liberals, linked Koestler’s argument to the totalitarianism it purported to oppose, commenting sardonically that “there was a moment during the Congress when I felt that we were being invited to summon up Beelzebub in order to defeat Satan.” Similar sentiments on the part of many intellectuals, as Saunders notes, led Josselson (urged on by his CIA superiors) to marginalize the participation of Koestler and Borkenau in the Congress; they were considered too fanatical in their anticommunism.

These debates were endemic and were a function of real differences among the opinionated intellectuals who affiliated with the Congress, as seen in the divisions that arose repeatedly within the American affiliate. Hardliners like Hook and Burnham pitted themselves against others, like Macdonald and Mary McCarthy, who were highly critical of the formers’ credulous approach to American society and foreign policy. My basic point: intellectuals such as Silone, Berlin, Aron, Spender, Bell,

and Schlesinger, Jr., were not cast in a single mold, and the quality of the anticommunism they shared is not reducible to the views of the hard-liners.

2. It is important to pay careful attention to a second feature of the Congress noted by Saunders—that it was by and large an association of intellectuals who were social democrats, who thought of themselves as members of a broadly defined democratic left. Saunders observes that in the eyes of the CIA and the American national security establishment, support of the “NCL” (noncommunist left) was seen as central to the containment of communism in Europe. The CIA no doubt had its own reasons for believing this to be the case. But it is nonetheless significant that the Congress by and large was *not* a right-wing organization but one committed to New Deal-type reform in Europe. This is especially significant because it opens up some interesting questions about postwar American foreign policy and indeed about the CIA itself—questions that Saunders prefers to ignore. If we ask why the U.S. government believed that the noncommunist left was the best alternative in Europe, then we have to give up some simplistic stereotypes about postwar American foreign policy and consider the possibility that the State Department, and even the CIA, for a combination of ideological and pragmatic reasons, believed that reform would bring more stability to Europe than would the reinforcement of entrenched privilege. It is a historical oversimplification to view the CIA’s role in the murder of Salvador Allende, say, as the apotheosis of liberal foreign policy, just as it would be reductive to hold Congress intellectuals responsible for Augusto Pinochet. They were anticommunists, to be sure; they were antirevolutionaries. But as Hegel once noted, only in the dark do all cows look gray. Compared to communists and their “fellow travelling” supporters, all anticommunists may look the same. In fact, the differences among them are very important.

3. Saunders devotes a brief chapter to McCarthyism, focused on its repressive effects and on the failure of many Congress intellectuals in the United States and Britain to come out strongly against it. She draws three general conclusions: first, that the Congress lib-

erals were cowardly; second, that McCarthyism, far from representing a threat to liberalism, was in fact the logical fulfillment of the anticommunist liberal project; and third (though this seems inconsistent with the previous point), that McCarthyism was an aberration that served to make *liberal* anticommunism look by contrast democratically authentic and acceptable.

Each of these points is, perhaps, partly true; but each is also seriously exaggerated. For Saunders’s own narrative makes it clear that there were serious divisions about McCarthyism among Congress liberals. If ACCF leaders such as Hook, Kristol, and Burnham were “soft” on it, others, such as Macdonald, McCarthy, and Richard Rovere were harsh critics. These disagreements were vigorously and publicly aired. Indeed, Saunders points out that Joseph McCarthy vociferously attacked the State Department and the CIA because of their support for the European noncommunist left.

THERE WERE important ideological and historical affinities between McCarthyism and the perspective of the more doctrinaire members of the ACCF (the Europeans, for obvious reasons, were horrified by McCarthy and by those Americans who supported him). And it is clear that anticommunist measures supported by many liberals, such as the Truman administration’s loyalty oaths, helped set the stage for McCarthy’s witch-hunt. Still, McCarthyism was not simply liberalism run amok. As fifties liberals such as Richard Hofstadter, Richard Rovere, and Seymour Martin Lipset saw, it was a form of right-wing populism that was antiliberal, anti-intellectual, and anti-New Deal. It was fueled by powerful currents of isolationism and xenophobia, laced with a strong dose of anti-Semitism. There was an important difference—historically, politically, and ethically—between those who supported McCarthy and those Congress-affiliated intellectuals who were anticommunist but also liberal and social democratic, just as there was a difference between Barry Goldwater and Lyndon Johnson, between George Wallace and Hubert Humphrey, and between Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton (though in

many ways McCarthyism bears a closer resemblance to the contemporary discourse of Jorgö Haider and Jean Marie LePen than it does to contemporary American conservatism).

4. If Saunders had offered a more nuanced account of the complexity of cold war liberal opinion, then she might also have been able to see that the story of the demise of the Congress is far richer than the sensationalist one she tells. On her account, the Congress was undone by the wave of revelations, beginning in 1967, that blew the cover of the CIA and delegitimized the Congress. But this is only part of the story. In order to understand it all, one must ask why the revelations of CIA covert support had such an incendiary effect. To answer that question, we must make a serious analysis of the multiple crises of postwar American liberalism in the 1960s, centered around the civil rights and antiwar movements, the rise of the New Left, and the complex relationship between liberalism and the New Left. Even the most simplistic version of such a narrative—one in which the New Left is seen as the noble antithesis of everything corrupt about anticommunist liberalism—would be better than Saunders's story of media scandal. But what occurred to liberalism in the sixties was nothing less than an *implosion* of crisis proportions, for which liberals were themselves partially responsible.⁴ It is undeniable that the "vital center" liberalism extolled by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., was complicit in a politics of compromise with the segregationist South, just as it is undeniable that it was responsible for U.S. military intervention and escalation in Vietnam. This was a highly problematic liberalism, and the late-sixties revelations about CIA involvement in the Congress highlighted its compromised character.

But it is equally true that by the mid-sixties vital center liberals were genuinely conflicted on these matters, and that liberals played a crucial role in the unfolding critique that brought the vital center down. Saunders never tells us that many of the most prominent American liberals associated with the Congress were active and vocal supporters of the civil rights movement, nor does she mention that the Ford Foundation—whose ties with the CIA and whose complicity in money laundering to

the Congress she does discuss—was one of a number of liberal philanthropies that also provided financial support to civil rights and voter education projects. Similarly, though she notes that the Vietnam War shattered the broad consensus of liberals regarding the containment of communism (Josselson himself came to oppose the war), she is uninterested in the role that people like McGeorge Bundy, George Kennan, and John Kenneth Galbraith played, not only in originally justifying the war, but later on in arguing for its termination. The gradual defection of these liberals was a central development in the shattering of the domino theory rationale for U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

BY THE MID-SIXTIES, vital center liberalism was deeply contradictory and conflicted, and few liberals remained wedded to the positions of the fifties. Some, such as the famed neoconservatives, began a move to the right, to an even harder and more hawkish anticommunism. Others shifted around uncomfortably without clear direction (in 1969, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., published a book entitled *The Crisis of Confidence*, which gave eloquent voice to this liberal confusion). And yet others moved to the left. It is worth noting that *The Pentagon Papers* was written by liberals, and that a disillusioned liberal—Daniel Ellsberg—leaked the text to liberal reporters with the *New York Times*; that the *New York Review of Books*, which consistently ran New Left critiques of American domestic and foreign policy throughout the sixties and seventies, was started in 1964 by Jason Epstein and Robert Silvers, who had earlier been associated with the Congress; that William Sloane Coffin, whose anticommunist liberalism in the fifties led him to work, in Saunders's telling, with the CIA, was a major figure in the antiwar movement; that Stephen Spender, the original editor of *Encounter*, in 1972 established the journal *Index on Censorship* to defend the freedom of dissidents and protestors; and that the writers' association PEN International, originally supported and subsidized by the CIA and the Congress, became an outspoken critic of American counterinsurgency policy and a vocal supporter of the rights of critics of American-supported

regimes throughout the third world.

My point here is not to lionize liberalism or to present any one of these efforts as somehow beyond reproach. It is to insist that cold war liberalism was a rich and complex discourse; that its demise in the sixties owed less to public scandals than to serious contradictions that were experienced and articulated, in different ways, by many liberal intellectuals and activists; that the line separating liberalism from the New Left is complex and blurred. A serious accounting of postwar liberalism would have to deal with all this. Saunders's book provides us with much of the information necessary to accomplish such a task. But she is unable or unwilling to think deeply about these issues. In her political universe, all cows are gray.

Rethinking Anticommunist Liberalism

Saunders does not take the full measure of her subject. The cold war was a unique moment in world history. It unfolded in the wake of two bloody world wars that shattered European civilization. It pitted two global superpowers in an arms race that had the potential to destroy the world as we know it. The anticommunist liberals of the Congress, like any group of human beings, included cranks and fanatics. But its participants were by and large intelligent people who had experienced political trauma, learned firsthand about the authoritarian propensities of communism, and saw themselves as acting in defense of freedom. They were neither the noble heroes depicted by neoconservatives nor the villains depicted by leftist debunkers. Indeed, in important respects they were not a "they" at all. Although the CIA may have imagined that it was bankrolling a military-like organization, the Congress was in fact a very loose association.

We now know much that was not known, or only dimly suspected, by the Congress intellectuals. We owe this knowledge to muckrakers of the New Left. Motivated in part by the confusions and hypocrisies of cold war liberalism, the New Left sought to unmask liberalism generally and to hold it accountable for its failures. These efforts came to a head during the Vietnam War. Magazines such as *Ramparts* began to investigate the Congress and to

make public information about its CIA sponsorship; Lasch's important polemic on "The Cultural Cold War" was published in the *Nation*, and Noam Chomsky's equally important "The New Mandarins" was published in the *New York Review of Books*. The New Left critique may have seemed to many liberals as a kind of apostasy; in fact it was essential if liberalism was to be anything more than an empty shell. By the late sixties the Congress had outlived whatever usefulness it could claim; Lasch, Chomsky, Andrew Kopkind, and the other New Leftists whose criticisms helped make this clear did an admirable job, even if they could neither anticipate nor control what would follow the demise of the liberalism they chastised.

But I wonder whether Saunders's restatement of the New Left critique is apposite today. Although it is true that we currently experience new forms of liberal hypocrisy, it is also true that we have experienced much else that sets us apart from the New Left. In some ways, the same charge that the New Left brought against the Congress can be brought against the New Left itself—that it was insufficiently aware of the limitations of its own politics, insufficiently attentive to the depredations of communism, and insufficiently appreciative of the value of liberalism. Just as the sixties caused many Congress liberals to think again about their anticommunism, so the eighties caused many New Left intellectuals to reconsider the vehemence of their antiliberalism.⁵

WHAT DO WE know now that New Left activists did not know or would not acknowledge in 1968? That communism really was an awful system; that those anticommunist dissidents who fought against it in Berlin, Budapest, Prague, Gdansk, and Warsaw were partisans of freedom who deserved the solidarity and support of Western liberals; that "national liberation struggles" in the third world were not the riddle of history solved, and that they typically gave rise to terrible regimes, of the left or right; that the New Left succeeded in generating valuable movements on behalf of civil rights, peace, ecology, and sexual freedom, but that by the late sixties it had begun to produce its own pathologies; that there

really is an important difference between anticommunist conservatives and liberals; and that liberalism is not simply a “corporate” and “militarist” ideology in need of debunking.

THE ANTICOMMUNIST liberals associated with the Congress need to be understood in the context of the challenging times in which they lived. They worked on behalf of an ideal of freedom that, in its own time, had much to recommend it, whatever its limits. They took up the cause of persecuted citizens of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, including the communist dissidents of the Petofi Circle in Budapest in 1958 and the Polish and Czech Marxist revisionists of 1968. They opened their pages to the writings of Czeslaw Milosz, Leszek Kolakowski, Andrei Sakharov, and others persecuted in their own countries. They rejected isolationism and nationalist parochialism and defended a conception of universal human values. Looking back on these activities from a post-1989 vantage point, it is hard to dismiss them. There is something truly noble here. To be sure, these intellectuals committed many errors (some more than others), and often disagreed sharply among themselves about these errors. Also, to be sure, the liberals of the Congress were not the only ones to insist on the antinomy between communism and freedom. Democratic socialists such as Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, for example, who started *Dissent* magazine in the mid-fifties as an alternative to the Congress and its journals, were equally vocal in their criticisms of communism and more emphatic in their social democratic advocacy. But the line separating these groups is a blurred one; their members attended the same conferences, wrote for many of the same journals, published the same European authors—Silone, Camus, Spender, and so on—and experienced many of the same conflicts with the emerging New Left.⁶

I don't mean to excuse the crimes committed in the name of anticommunism. But the intellectuals of the Congress were not criminals. Many of them spoke out bravely on important issues, and some—Aron, Berlin, Silone—made enduring contributions to political thought. We live today in a post-cold war

world. But we confront many of the same dilemmas that presented themselves to anticommunist liberals. Should they have ignored communist repression in Budapest in 1956 because speaking out against it meant making common cause with the United States—the United States that in other places supported oppressive regimes? Should Serbian brutality in Bosnia or Kosovo have been downplayed because the U.S. State Department was calling for military action—though it had opposed intervention in Rwanda? These are complex questions, but the answer finally must be no. The U.S. foreign policy establishment may have its own reasons for (sometimes) doing (some of) the right things. But its reasons are not the only ones that might be advanced; its “human rights” rhetoric is not the only possible discourse of human rights; and its efforts on behalf of “humanitarian intervention,” when they are forthcoming, are not the only ones worth considering.

Beyond this, there are times when what the U.S. government does is simply right, and should be supported because it is right.⁷ For many of us, the U.S. military response to the September 11 attacks is a compelling example of this. In the face of these attacks, antiliberal shibboleths about American imperialism ring hollow. Condemning U.S. deceit or hypocrisy may put one on the side of ideological “truth,” and it may provide a sense of moral purity. But only in a world in which the United States is the only actor, the only source of wrongdoing, can this suffice for a serious political position. And this is not the world in which we live.

The anticommunist liberals of the cold war are instructive here, for what they did right and for what they did wrong, for the ways in which their commitment to a certain conception of freedom led them to choose a side in the cold war, for the ways in which they wrestled with the moral ambiguities of this choice, and for the ways in which they failed to wrestle with them sufficiently. They are a part of our history that we must not forget. Saunders is to be credited for reminding us of this. But we do ourselves a disservice if we fail to recognize that debunking is sometimes the beginning but never the end of serious criticism. Unless it is informed by a sober sense of the dilemmas of

political judgment in dark times, debunking can easily turn into cynicism. In our own dark times, the need for sober judgment has hardly passed.

JEFFREY C. ISAAC teaches political theory at Indiana University, Bloomington. His book *The Poverty of Progressivism* will be published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2003.

1. Michael Paul Rogin, "When the CIA Was the NEA." *Nation* (June 12, 2000), p. 17.

2. See Christopher Hitchens, "Was George Orwell a Snitch?" *Nation* (December 14, 1998), p. 8.

3. See James D. Wilkinson, *The Intellectual Resistance in Europe* (Harvard University Press, 1981).

4. See Allen J. Matusow, *The Unravelling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960's* (Harper, 1984), and E.J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (Touchstone, 1991).

5. See especially James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Seige of Chicago* (Simon and Schuster, 1987) and Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars* (Metropolitan Books, 1995).

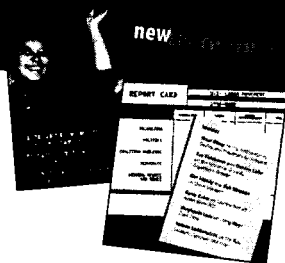
6. See Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York*

Intellectuals and Their World (Oxford University Press, 1986); Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (University of North Carolina Press, 1987); and, especially, Gregory D. Sumner, *Dwight Macdonald and the "politics" Circle* (Cornell University Press, 1996). Many of these similarities, and differences, are broached in the fascinating 1967 Symposium organized by *Commentary* magazine on "Liberal Anti-Communism Revisited" (September 1967).

7. See my "Supporting the War: Thoughts on Doing Things with Words," *American Prospect* online <http://www.prospect.org/webfeatures/2001/11/isaac-j-11-26.html> and "Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan: The Limits of Marc Herold's 'Comprehensive Accounting.'" *OpenDemocracy* (March 14, 2002) http://www.opendemocracy.net/forum/document_details.asp?CatID=98&DocID=1143&DebateID=152.

Labor Forum

Intellectual Ammunition for Labor's Revival



A fair and just society is impossible without a strong labor movement. **New Labor Forum** features spirited debate by leading labor activists and intellectuals about the issues critical to the future of unions in America:

- organizing in the global economy
- the crisis in public education
- the politics of race and gender
- labor's role in ownership and management
- independent political action
- union democracy, and more...

**Join the debate,
subscribe today!**

One Year
(2 issues).....\$20

Two Years
(4 issues).....\$30

Institutional One Year
(2 issues).....\$50

Institutional Two Years
(4 issues).....\$80

SEND PAYMENT TO:

New Labor Forum
25 West 43rd Street, 19th Floor
New York, NY 10036

or call 212-827-0200

or subscribe online at

www.qc.edu/newlaborforum

From Che to Marcos

The Changing Grassroots Left in Latin America

The guerrilla is the combat vanguard of the people . . . armed and willing to carry out a series of warlike actions for the one possible strategic end—the seizure of power.

Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (1961)

Questions and more questions fill up our nights . . . "Were these words the best ones to say what we wanted to say?" "Were they the right words at this time?" "Were they understandable?"

Subcomandante Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury* (1994)

Jeffrey W. Rubin

CHE GUEVARA spoke of small, dedicated bands that would seize power through guerrilla action, as did Fidel Castro. The location of power was in the capitalist economy and the state, which served the wealthy few, and these two needed to be overthrown by the working class. One of Guevara's contributions was to put the peasantry into this equation, as well as to claim that guerrilla *focos*, or centers, rather than organized workers, could begin the struggle. The goals were to set up a new, collectivized, noncapitalist economy, to establish universal education and health care, and to create a "new man" in a new society. The model was Cuba, where the U.S.-supported dictator was overthrown, a new form of political authority established, and living conditions greatly improved.

Che is a revolutionary icon to this day. When the Brazilian newspaper *Zero Hora* reports that a mayor in the state of Rio Grande do Sul is a leader in the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST), the mayor is shown in his office with a photo of Che on the wall. Rural women in Rio Grande do Sul claim Che as well, evoking his vision of "new men and women" at their 2001 state assembly.

Subcomandante Marcos is the masked, non-Indian leader of the Zapatistas, a Mayan guerrilla army of sorts, one that converted it-

self very quickly into a nonviolent opposition engaged in national and international debate and negotiation. He is a postmodern spokesperson—joking, sly, literary, passionate, erotic, philosophical; speaking out, like Che, against exploitation and marginalization, and naming unfettered free trade and, implicitly, capitalism as the enemy.

But Marcos and the Zapatistas speak also for a new kind of democracy, a democracy that takes procedure and voting seriously, which Che's *focos* and Castro's Communist Party did not. Che and Castro emphasized the importance of a vanguard's leading the *pueblo* to revolution, and then leading in the construction of a new society. Given this scenario, democracy didn't matter, and political control and repression were permissible and necessary.

In contrast, in a language new for the radical left in Latin America, Marcos has defended a policy of alliances within a complex civil society, no longer broken down into Che's bourgeois and working classes. Marcos also speaks about and with Indians—a category of people that barely existed, politically, for revolutionaries of Che's era. Correspondingly, Marcos calls for a dual Indian-Mexican nation, based on concepts of citizenship and culture, with no revolution of the old sort, led by an armed vanguard, in sight. Citizenship and culture, like democracy, need to be thought about and developed, and, Marcos argues, in this process the left needs to engage with the reality of difference—in class and worldview and also in race and gender. Today in Brazil, it is the ico-

nography of Chiapas and Marcos that appears in the contemporary artwork of the Mercosul Biennial in Porto Alegre and in discussions at the World Social Forum (an alternative to the World Economic Forum) in the same Brazilian city. (Che, however, dominated the T-shirt market at the Social Forum.)

Although separated by three decades, Che and Marcos faced similar societies, characterized by vast inequality and deprivation: hunger, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, and underemployment. Latin American countries are among the most unequal in the world, and they have remained so through the processes of industrialization and urbanization that characterized much of the twentieth century. In the face of turbulent political conflicts over inclusion and equality, both Che and Marcos operated with the broad notion that to be on the left means to oppose economic inequality and poverty and to reject political rule at the service of business or political elites.

However, although both Che and Marcos offer visions of exploitation and transformation, the futures they describe, and the means of getting there, differ markedly. How can we think about the path from Che to Marcos, from the 1960s to the 1990s, from clandestine guerrilla *focos* to the Zapatistas' National Democratic Convention—where, in front of the Mexican flag, they literally handed over the struggle from the *foco* to the representatives of civil society? And how should we evaluate the results of this transformation in leftist ideology and strategy?

AS SOMEONE who has lived in and written about Mexico (and, more recently, Brazil), I believe that the place to start thinking about the 1960s and all that came after is Mexico City in 1968, on the eve of the Olympic Games. I will begin there, at a quintessential 1968 moment of euphoria and possibility, and then look at what followed. I will trace the Mexican path from Che to Marcos and then recast my story in a broader Latin American framework—looking at the radical mobilizations of the 1960s, the establishment of military dictatorships, and the forms of leftist organizing that emerged under the dictatorships and developed and changed during the

more recent decades of democratization.

I will then compare the visions and strategies of the sixties and the nineties, asking what has been gained and what lost. Is the language of democracy, culture, and civil society a step forward, or was the dream of organizing the masses to overthrow the state and capitalism a better bet? Has Marcos trivialized revolution with his mask and his pipe, his humor and flirtations, his clever references to Radio Shack and the stars of Mexican telenovelas? Have the Zapatistas, along with many activist groups elsewhere in Latin America, erred dramatically in thinking that through alliance with something called civil society, or through changes in something called culture, a system of power can be transformed?

The Mexico City Student Movement

Like its counterparts elsewhere, the student movement in Mexico City created new forms of activism that shaped the lives of a generation and have influenced society to the present day. The movement began in city high schools around issues of police intervention. It spread to high schools and universities across the nation, as a campaign against the violence of the police forces known as *granaderos*, the laws supporting this violence, the taking of political prisoners, and the structure of political authority generally.

Nineteen-sixty-eight in Mexico City was a time of expansiveness and the breaking down of barriers—a time for forging alliances among students, workers, and the marginal urban poor and challenging the political regime. Later on came the questioning of middle-class conventions, of the official history, and of the established artistic and literary culture. It was a time of great hope, seemingly on the verge of transformation. Students were out in the streets, in the plazas, on the buses, forming brigades, “going to the people.” There were movement committees at each school and heady experiences of argument, exploration, and democratic practice. There was no central leader. Families were drawn in, whole apartment buildings and neighborhoods. A revolution was happening—not Che’s revolution—but a revolution from within the system, nonviolent, driven by euphoria, conviction, and the excitement of ex-

perimentation on the ground.

The ferment in Mexico City culminated in a massacre—one of the defining moments of political repression in twentieth-century Latin America—at a demonstration in the Plaza of the Three Cultures at Tlatelolco. The plaza is closed off on three sides by buildings. The army closed off the fourth side and came in shooting, on the ground and with helicopters, killing at least three hundred people and arresting more than a thousand. Families had to search the streets, hospitals, and prisons to find their children.

The massacre at Tlatelolco had an enormous impact; it was the moment that revealed the regime for what it was, a government shooting at its own people. This sort of state violence was particularly significant in Mexico, which had experienced a revolution in the 1910s and dramatic progressive reforms in the 1930s, and still had a government that claimed to rule in the interests of all its people. Ever since, the legitimacy of the Mexican government has been in question.

What Happened to Student Activism?

The violence of Tlatelolco and the arrests that followed destroyed the mass student movement and its open, democratic politics. Now activists from Mexico City went to the provinces to make the revolution in a different fashion. They became a clandestine left, very close to the commitments and visions of Che, working through small revolutionary *focos*, mostly nonviolently, to organize peasants, workers, and city dwellers more generally into a radical movement.

The old activism also took on popular cultural forms and was expressed, for example, in rock and roll, which had its own earlier history. Rock in Mexico was seen at first (in the 1950s) as a threat to respectable mores, but it was domesticated, with Spanish lyrics and muted content, in the early 1960s. After Tlatelolco, it took a countercultural turn, labeled *la onda chicana*, the Chicano wave, and attracted the *jippies*. This music represented simultaneously a withdrawal from the public political sphere and a challenge to Mexican society. It is interesting to compare the Chicano wave to the Chicano movement that burgeoned

in the United States at the same time. The U.S. movement represented a militant narrowing and sharpening of identity; it gained political strength by rejecting a mainstream American identity and claiming a Mexican core, sometimes labeled Aztlán. The Mexican *onda chicana*, in contrast, rejected conventional Mexican nationalism—the Mexican core—to develop a *Mexican* rock and roll in English, with the innovators often being from the north of Mexico who brought musical and cultural influences from across the border.

The *onda Chicana* culminated in a massive rock festival—the Mexican Woodstock—in Avándaro. Again, this collective action, “cultural,” not “political,” brought a repressive response: the Mexican government confiscated the film of the festival, literally erasing it from history; banned rock concerts; and prohibited radio stations from playing rock music. Interestingly, the Mexican government went on to encourage middle-class student listeners to turn to *nuevo canto*, a melodic folk music with a different sort of radical content that expressed solidarity with the struggle of the Latin American masses, but without the rock edge.

Where did rock go? Eventually, it went to a different, lower class, urban, disruptive set of locations and forms, to performances and performance spaces deep in the barrios and shantytowns. It became a music and an idiom seen by many today as both subversive and democratic.

AS THE MEMBERS of the sixties generation got older, many of the ex-radical activists and the rock and rollers turned into *nuevo canto* folks. They moved into adult society, inside and outside the government—from schoolteachers, artists, and heads of state welfare programs to Zapatista advisers and government negotiators with the Zapatistas. (This happened not only in Mexico, but all over Latin America.) The most optimistic observers see connections, webs, networks of activists and sympathizers who speak both the language of the Mexican regime *and* the language of dissent and social justice. Perhaps, this generational shift explains the calls for electoral democracy in the 1990s, as well as the massive public willingness to see the cause of the

Zapatistas as just. Perhaps, also, it explains the election of Vicente Fox as president and his appointment of moderates and leftists to negotiate with the Zapatistas in Chiapas—and with the United States, too.

All along, though, there has been a radical, clandestine, Che-inspired activism in the provinces, in rural and urban locations: land takeovers and powerful squatter settlements in Monterrey, called *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Liberty); an urban popular movement in Durango that organized neighborhood by neighborhood; *campesino* mobilizations in the northern Yaqui and Mayo valleys that led to successful collective agricultural enterprises; and a peasant-worker coalition in the southern Mexican city of Juchitán, where Zapotec Indians revitalized their culture, fought to hold onto their land, and won municipal elections. This activism was strong and impassioned, and it eventually became public and threatening; revolution, many thought, was on its way. In Juchitán, for example, the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) was Zapotec, militant, and militantly separate from what would come to be called Mexican civil society. COCEI's political ideology was a blend of Che, Marxism, and fierce attachment to Zapotec culture. All these 1970s movements were inspired—and most of them actively organized—by the clandestine left that came out of 1968. And they in turn spawned a new generation of radical movements in the 1980s: independent labor unions, a democratic teachers' movement, and a new phenomenon called *coordinadoras*—the coordinating committees of radical peasant movements or urban neighborhood organizations.

THE RESULT was a transformation in what was possible politically in Mexico. Massive public battles in the 1970s and small, discernible regional and sectoral shifts in power relations in the 1980s culminated in President Carlos Salinas's recognition of and readiness to negotiate with opposition popular movements in 1988. This was a new moment in twentieth-century Mexico, where the government had always demanded that oppositional groups forgo their independence and become part of the ruling party if they wanted

to gain some of their demands.

In a turn that has gotten particular attention, a group of activists from the north went to Chiapas in the early 1980s, at the invitation of the archbishop of San Cristóbal, Samuel Ruiz. Ruiz had come to Chiapas as a relatively apolitical, conservative churchman. Traveling across the state and seeing the abysmal living conditions of the Mayan Indians who made up the majority of its population led him to organize an Indigenous Congress in 1974. He went on to help the Mayans explore and build on their Indian identities and to challenge the poverty that made them the most marginal of the Mexican poor. Ruiz became an adherent of liberation theology, and he welcomed political organizing by outside activists. He met members of the clandestine left, from groups like *Línea Proletaria* and *Política Popular*, and invited them to come to Chiapas—a move that eventually resulted in the armed Zapatistas.

What we see today in Chiapas is a product of the coming together of those leftist activists, the radical bishop and his organizational legacy, and Indian communities and cultures in the Lacandón jungle. The Zapatistas began in part from Che, seizing world attention as an armed guerrilla band. They borrowed significantly from the militant and vanguardist Zapotec Indian movement COCEI in Juchitán, placing culture at the heart of politics. Despite these similarities, however, the extraordinarily complex and rich history of political discussion and organizing in Chiapas from the 1970s to the 1990s produced something genuinely original, a new leftist language and vision. This includes negotiation about what it means to be Indian within a larger Mexican nation. It includes discussion about new forms of democracy and an inventiveness regarding civil society—exemplified by the convention in the jungle; by the Zapatistas' national *consulta*, in which they asked people around the nation to comment and vote; by Marcos's communiqués; and by the accords on Indian autonomy hammered out with government negotiators in 1996 (though never implemented in that form). The new leftist vision also includes a communication and public debate deeply rooted in popular cultural idioms—indeed, in the language of rock and roll and its progeny.

The Left in Latin America

This brings us again to the path from the 1960s to the present, from Che to Marcos. I've suggested that the euphoric and unprecedented mobilizations of the 1960s in Mexico spawned a generational shift in public consciousness, a more critical and subversive rock and roll, and a network of clandestine and then public grassroots movements. These ingredients together produced a new kind of radical project in Chiapas. A broadly similar shift can be seen in the rest of Latin America. Despite the success of armed revolution in Cuba and admiration for Cuba across the Latin American left, leftist politics from the 1950s to the early 1970s worked through electoral systems with some degree of democratic credibility or through grassroots movements that sought reform—as in Mexico before 1968. Challenges from the left sometimes brought great turbulence; many leftists lived at the border of legality and violence. But with the exception of a handful of guerrilla movements—in Venezuela, Colombia, and southern Mexico—opposition politics engaged directly with existing institutions. Indeed, between the 1950s and 1970s, public, legal competition over basic issues of labor, land, and economic development characterized much of Latin American politics.

Brazil was a paradigmatic case of urban and rural mobilization during these decades, with agrarian leagues claiming land and labor rights and electorates voting for progressive change. In Argentina and Chile as well, there was a ferment of democratic activism—which led, in a non-Guevarist mode, to challenges to state power, not through *focos*, but through public movements that mixed militancy and revolutionary Marxism with strong appeals for reform. In this somewhat democratic mid-century moment—democratic in the sense of formal political systems and increasing public voice—there was a clear move to the left among many voters. Communists and radicals of other stripes agreed that the time was not right for *focos* and violence. However, as democratic reformism was met with governmental repression, the left focused increasingly on armed guerrilla action, reanimating the legend of Che.

Brazil's move to the left was curtailed by military intervention in 1964. The coup, which

was directly supported by the United States, provided a model for the military governments that came to predominate in most of the continent within a decade. With some variation in each case, this involved the closing down or strict control of Congress, the banning or manipulation of political parties, the imprisonment of opposition leaders, and the arrest of anyone associated with anyone suspected of holding radical views or opposing the military regimes. The years from the Brazilian coup in 1964 until the Chilean transition to democracy in 1989 were a time of torture and disappearances.

AS A RESULT of this repression, the language of guerrilla or revolutionary takeover of the state played an increasing role in oppositional discourse. Inspired by Cuba and Che, armed, militant, Marxist, materialist struggle became one of the prominent forms of activism in Latin America. The Sandinista Revolution in 1979 in Nicaragua was a kind of culmination, updating the Cuban model, adopting its one-party political structure, its large development projects, and its state-run agrarian reform, but also innovating in the face of popular resistance. Had it not been opposed by violent U.S. intervention, the Sandinista government might have found a path to greater socio-economic equality and more responsive political representation in Central America—an alternative path from Che to Marcos.

But something else happened in the course of opposition to the dictatorships, something that parallels what occurred in Chiapas between the Mayans and the urban radicals. Throughout Latin America, new kinds of social movements addressed a broad range of issues, intertwined with but not limited to economic concerns, in increasingly democratic fashion. These emerged out of and alongside the Marxist, Che-inspired movements, much as the Zapatistas did. But, also like the Zapatistas, they engaged with the conditions of daily life, with popular culture, and even with academic political theorizing in new ways, beginning to focus on questions of culture, citizenship, and civil society.

This change involved a conceptual shift re-

garding the nature of power. One source of the shift was feminist theory and activism, which spread throughout Latin America, reaching rural and urban women, influencing activists and academics, and generating networks of interconnection nationally and globally. The transitions to democracy and the openings they appeared to offer were another source. Brazilian political scientist Evelina Dagnino attributes the conceptual change as well to the engagement of leftist intellectuals and activists with the work of Antonio Gramsci, which guided them to a serious consideration of the political significance of culture. This shift in conceptualizations of power, democracy, and opposition is typified and brought into sharp relief by the Zapatistas, but it is shared in different degrees by the Pan-Mayan movement in Guatemala, which focuses on the revitalization of Mayan history, language, and culture; by the Organization of Black Communities of the Pacific Coast of Colombia, which challenges development projects with alternative approaches to both race and biodiversity; and by the Participatory Budgeting Project in Porto Alegre, the Movement of Rural Women Workers in Rio Grande do Sul, and the Afro-Reggae Cultural Group in Rio de Janeiro. Each of these Brazilian groups seeks social change through innovative cultural and political pathways: redesigning institutional arrangements for budget allocation; linking land struggles with gender concerns and democratic organizational practices; or fighting violence and racism by training musicians and filling the streets of urban shantytowns with music.

Evaluating Social Movements

From the perspective of these recent movements, the Che-inspired radicalism of the previous left was a mistake. It produced terrible repression on the part of military governments. Activists put too much faith in the possibility of transformation and scarcely imagined the horrific brutality of these regimes. The newer movements are more sensitive to the enduring weight of the obstacles they face, in the form of state and army power and the ability of economic elites to summon up this power.

Even more significantly, Che-inspired radicalism placed too little value on democratic

forms and substance and lacked important kinds of cultural awareness. In contrast, the more recent varieties of leftist organizing exhibit, in varied and uneven ways, greater concern for democratic procedures, for cultural meaning, for multiple dimensions of power, and for gender, race, violence, and sexuality—along with different ways of relating all these concerns to material issues.

On the less economic end of the “new” spectrum, the leaders of the Afro-Reggae Cultural Group teach young children and teenagers in Rio de Janeiro’s most violent and drug-ridden favelas to play the drums. The group employs a language of culture and diversity similar to that of Marcos and postmodern theorists. With this language, Afro-Reggae secures grants from international foundations and has obtained government and private sector funds to open a music school and build a community center. In addition, it has expanded rapidly, running a young people’s theater group, a circus training program, a senior citizens’ chorus, and a spin-off band whose young members drum on tin cans. Acting through culture, and largely accepting the economic status quo, Afro-Reggae activists change the lives of individuals in the poor and marginal *favelas* in which they work, and they explicitly take on issues of racism and violence. Their leaders know that the media and foundations like them because their program appears unthreatening, and they use that to negotiate—for funds, for schools, for the ear of the mayor, the governor, and the drug traffickers—but not to create a black movement linked to electoral activity or to change the economic system.

In contrast to Afro-Reggae’s focus on culture, Marcos’s early communiqués and interviews suggest a more multidimensional approach, with their intertwined emphasis on the Chiapas economy, Mayan culture, and new imaginings of democratic politics. Here is a great hope for the left and for Latin America—a multifaceted radical politics that speaks for democracy *and* economic well-being *and* recognizes the cultural dimensions of people’s lives.

The Participatory Budgeting Project in Porto Alegre similarly combines concern for economic issues with internal democracy and

rootedness in neighborhood cultures. Since winning elections in 1988, the Workers Party in Porto Alegre has created and implemented a process by which people in neighborhoods decide exactly how to allocate the municipal service budget, down to whether to pave streets (and which streets) or build child care centers. As a result, through half-year cycles of community and regional meetings, large numbers of households in Porto Alegre have gotten sewage, and whole neighborhoods have literally been opened up to the city, so that buses, ambulances, and delivery trucks can get in and out. In addition, the participatory budgeting experience invites revisions of democratic theory, arguing that in order to institute democratic policymaking and accountability, elected legislatures must sometimes be circumvented by unpaid, elected neighborhood councils. Participatory Budgeting thus combines an economic focus with Marcos's call for democratic innovation.

The trajectory of the Movement of Rural Women Workers (MMTR) in Rio Grande do Sul illustrates the potential and the difficulty of maintaining the new, Marcos-like political forms. In the 1990s, poor rural women withdrew from leading agricultural movements to form their own movement, which addressed economic and gender concerns simultaneously, delicately balancing the two. This resulted in a politics that could envision distinct identities and strategies within a single movement, in Marcos-like fashion. In the past two years, though, the MMTR has shifted back to a more Che-like framework. At the MMTR state assembly last November, a talk that promised a gender perspective argued that U.S. imperialism, via Monsanto's genetically altered crops, was killing the children of rural workers. The subtlety and multiplicity of the mid-1990s language of gender was replaced by a simplistic materialist analysis and an emphasis on unified working class *luta*, or struggle. This was accompanied by a concern for nature and "pure seeds" that was entirely compatible with traditional women's roles. In response to this shift away from more nuanced economic and gender analysis, some local women's groups have distanced themselves from the class-based *luta* to continue pursuing multidimensional strate-

gies in their municipalities.

WHAT CAN WE learn from these Brazilian movements about the possibilities of left activism? The panorama of activism in Latin America shows a marked shift from Che to Marcos, one that can be seen today in the panoply of movements and NGOs seeking not to overthrow the state, unionize workers, or transform economies, but rather to create cultural change, foster democratic citizenship, fight racism and gender inequality, and strengthen civil societies. In their attention to culture and democracy, these newer, Marcos-type forms of activism represent the best hope for a moral and humane politics of transformation. But can they be successful?

At times, these Marcos-type movements focus exclusively on issues of culture and civil society, as with Afro-Reggae. It may be that such cultural efforts will in the long run produce both large networks and new groups of citizens, which together will promote reform through democratic politics. This is the conviction of many progressive nongovernmental organizations and civil-society activists in Mexico and Brazil. Or it may be that the Marcos-type groups will need to grapple more directly with economic issues and with the need for mass-based mobilization, and, that as they do so, the resulting innovations, rooted in concerns for democracy and culture, will produce unprecedented successes. This is the conviction and practice of movements such as Participatory Budgeting, the Zapatistas, and the more gender-focused groups within the Brazilian rural women's movement.

Alongside these Marcos-type "new" movements, the more Che-inspired model continues to claim some of the largest visible challenges to state power in Latin America. Employing hierarchical authority structures to build mass movements focused on economic issues, these movements raise compelling normative and empirical questions. The Colombian guerrillas, for example, have for several decades controlled large expanses of territory, kept out the state, and established cohesive communities for rural Colombians to whom the dignity and material benefits of national

citizenship have long been denied. At the same time, the guerrillas' political analysis has remained stagnant since the 1960s. Their organization is strictly hierarchical, and in recent years they have engaged increasingly in the kidnapping and murder of civilians.

In a compelling contemporary example of the Che-like position, the nonviolent Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST) in Brazil, with squatter settlements across the country, constitutes the single biggest public challenge to the neoliberal economic vision of the Brazilian government. The MST has created new forms of political protest and collective agriculture, and it has transformed Brazilians' beliefs about agrarian reform and social justice. This past March, in a highly symbolic act, the MST invaded the *fazenda* of the family of Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, bringing the issue of property relations to the forefront of Brazilian politics. MST leaders insist that their success results from their ability to mobilize with great efficiency; centralization and discipline are essential for combating a repressive rural power structure. Thus, the MST eschews internal democracy, imposes a single squatter and cooperative model on vastly different groups of rural supporters, rejects alliances with less radical rural movements, and for the most part marginalizes women and reproduces conventional racial hierarchies.

In a similar fashion, the Zapotec movement in Mexico, COCEI, has combined pathbreaking strategies of cultural elaboration and participation in Mexican elections with a marked lack of concern for democratic practices within the movement. Still, these Che-inspired movements are not uniformly undemocratic. Rather, they contain mixtures of voice and non-voice, accountability and non-accountability, and electoral and non-electoral activity—mixtures that change over time and vary from movement to movement.

Which forms of activism—those inspired by Che or by Marcos—can succeed in promoting significant changes in the vast inequalities, exclusions, and miseries that characterize Latin America? And how are people who value democracy to respond to these possibilities? This issue lies at the heart of social movement activism in Latin America today. Many who value

democracy and cultural diversity as overriding principles believe that the newer, Marcos-like approach is a better one, more likely to succeed, more gradual, more humane, more cognizant of the multifacetedness of people's lives. However, others argue that the Marcos path won't result in significant change. It focuses too much on identity and civil society and too little on economics and mass mobilization. The Che-inspired ideal of class analysis, *focos*, and mass unity is better, stronger somehow, and necessary in the face of the forces of economic globalization. Indeed, one could imagine a shift back, sometime in the future, by a new generation of activists, to the older, more Guevarist forms of political action, which might in turn prove more capable of challenging forms of domination in effective ways. But at what democratic and cultural cost?

THOSE COMMITTED to democracy, participation, and dissent may choose to oppose nondemocratic movements despite, or even because of, their potential effectiveness—because of the internal harms wrought by vanguardism in people's daily lives and the immeasurably greater harms that occur when such non-democratic practices shape the policies of leftist regimes. An alternative approach is to balance support and critique of Che-like activism, pressing for more attention to internal democracy and new approaches to culture. In either case, it is essential for those who believe in democracy to identify, not cover up, the non-democratic and in some cases violent practices of vanguardist social movements. This requires an ongoing critique—and active support for forces within and outside the movements who undertake such critiques. It means examining the changing mix of democracy and non-democracy in hierarchical movements and speaking for democratic alternatives.

This is indeed what many democratic Latin American activists and intellectuals are doing. Some offer degrees of support to vanguardist, hierarchical movements such as the MST in Brazil and the Zapotec COCEI in Mexico because these movements exist and make headway. To oppose them would limit or squelch the possibilities they represent. (Before the 1990s,

when the Colombian guerrillas were less involved in drug trafficking and violence against civilians and suffered from paramilitary violence themselves, they too fell into this category.) Others support vanguardist, hierarchical movements because they value the strength of these movements, with their capacities to mobilize, to act with speed and efficiency, and to threaten. Such movements challenge powerful elites and governments against great odds, and they can be valuable components of multifaceted activism. They may make reform more likely in democratic arenas and through Marcos-like movements, because of pressures they generate.

Practical and critical support for nondemocratic movements should not, however, eclipse the hope of the Marcos vision or the importance of directing resources, commitment, and creativity in this direction. Much of the experimentation on the Latin American left over the last twenty years has been about creating new kinds of broad-based democratic movements. These are movements that strive to maintain the separateness of different groups, democratically develop and articulate common goals, and bring together diverse networks for coordinated action.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S.-Mexican border separated a militant political move-

ment that promoted a single Chicano identity north of the border from a fluid and creative musical movement to the south. Within Mexico, too, radical political activism developed separately from cultural innovation. The experience of the Zapatistas erased this border between culture and politics. A Zapatista-like vision for a new social movement politics might mean a Chicano movement that practiced the hybridity of the rock and roll *onda chicana*—a movement that combined broad claims about class and discrimination with frank acknowledgments of cultural diversity, and combined *that* with the musical innovation of Afro-Reggae and the internal democracy of Participatory Budgeting. Put another way, perhaps big claims against discernible power can coexist, even if uneasily, with practices of internal democracy and recognition of difference. This is the most important lesson of the Mexican and Latin American path from Che to Marcos. ●

JEFFREY W. RUBIN is professor of history and research associate at the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture at Boston University. He is currently in Brazil doing research on democracy and grassroots innovation with a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Democratic Socialists of America

Members of the Democratic Socialists of America work in immediate struggles for justice—as we build a movement for long-term social change.

We bring to our work a strategy for building alliances among social movements and a vision of a more just and equitable society.

Join DSA and become a card-carrying member of the largest and most exciting democratic socialist organization in the U.S.!

☐ Send me more information about DSA.

☐ Enclosed are my dues!

☐ \$50 sustainer ☐ \$35 regular

☐ \$15 low-income/student

☐ Enclosed is a contribution of \$ ____ to help DSA's activism.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

DSA on the World Wide Web: <http://www.dsausa.org> (e-mail: dsa@dsausa.org)

Return to DSA, 180 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014 212/727-8610

The Fantasy of the Clip Art Farm

Notes from the New Rural Landscape

Janet Kauffman

FARM IS A four-letter word. Right up there with *flag*, *love*, and *home*. Any kid can draw *farm* with a few crayons—a red barn, a silo beside it. As easy as *love*, a heart, and *home*, a house. But these days, in many rural communities, *farm* is an f-word, too. With livestock factories reshaping agricultural areas, *farm* has fallen hard—plummeted—from the sacred to the obscene.

The livestock operations that surround my Midwest town, Hudson, Michigan, still call themselves farms. Most are dairies, and they're all huge, all built within the last few years. In the language of law, they're Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) with a thousand plus Animal Units—that is, seven hundred or more confined cows—and open-air waste pits that hold millions of gallons of liquefied feces and urine. Like the hog CAFOs in North Carolina, Missouri, and Washington and chicken operations all over the place, they're the largest constructions on the new rural landscape: animal factories that from the air resemble airplane hangars.

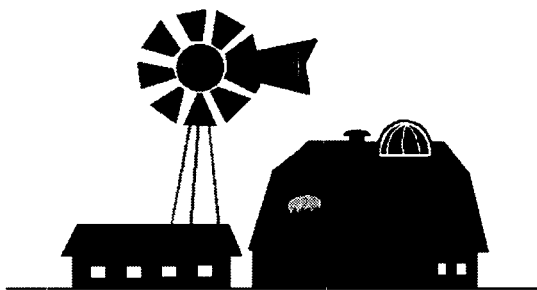
From the ground, the buildings are long, low, steel constructions, some of them a quarter mile long. When I showed a picture of one of these places to my Mennonite cousin in Pennsylvania, she said it reminded her of a Mennonite church, plain and simple. She got the up-front message—this is a clean place, orderly, unadorned. CAFO dairy design is spare—white siding on the long walls of “freestall” barns where the cows are confined. If the milkhouse faces the road, maybe there are a few decorative bricks or tiles as a façade. At the largest facility (three thousand cows), just opened for business south of town, an entry drive leads past a circular pool that looks

like it might someday have a clean-water fountain upsurping.

Out back, however, out of sight except from a plane, are the pits, lagoons, and cesspools of millions of gallons of untreated animal waste. What you *never* see at CAFOs—not from the road, and not even from the air—are the things most people picture when they think of “farm.” At CAFOs, you will *not* see

cows outside grazing
red hip barns
pastureland
upright silos for storing feed
straw as bedding
windmills

Yet these elements persist in ads, brochures, the imagination—the full iconography of the myth of the American farm. The red-barn-and-silo-background with green-pastureland-foreground sells cheese and milk on television to this day. These features appear without fail in the clip art images that Microsoft provides as “farm,” including this image, chosen by the Michigan Department of Agriculture for the cover of June 2000 Web publication *Generally Accepted Agricultural*



Management Practices.

When designers draw an “Ag” image, they cluster and stylize the same farm elements that kids draw. And, more important, when lobbyists for industrial agriculture, such as the American Farm Bureau Federation, argue for

no regulation of CAFOs, they talk about family farms, the farmstead, and conjure up the same small-scale clip art image.

IN FACT, the clip art farm elements are thirty to a hundred and thirty years old, anachronisms in most rural areas of the Midwest. The red hip barns, for instance, like the one with haymow brimming in the Department of Ag image, were constructed around here in the late 1800s, with some newer ones built through the 1930s. Seventy and more years ago, loose hay for feed and straw for bedding were lifted into the mows by a system of knives and pulleys. In winter, livestock were housed in the lower levels of the barns, and hay could be forked down to them through trapdoors or chutes. In summer, animals fed outside on pasture.

Windmills date from the land-clearing settlement days of the nineteenth century, when they served as the energy source for pumping water. Almost all windmills ceased operation when electricity and electric pumps came to rural areas here in the 1930s.

The windmill is a fine design element, though. It's hard to give up! And easy to over-size as well, like a sun shining over the farmstead.

Silos—those erect ones in the clip art farm—replaced the haymows for storing animal feed. With silage choppers and power augers, feed could be mixed, lifted in silos, moved back to stalls, without much handwork. Silos were constructed relatively recently, especially through the 1950s to the 1970s, and smaller farms still use them.

In the new rural landscape, however, silos do not appear; they can't store the quantities of feed required in confinement facilities. CAFOs use concrete "bunker" silos—they just call them bunkers. Bunkers are excavations with concrete walls on three sides. Hay, corn, and other feed are chopped, then dumped and hauled in and out with front-end loaders. Black plastic held down with tires usually covers the bunkers, one of the low-tech details at these state-of-the-art facilities.

The lowest-tech feature of CAFOs—the one that least lends itself to image design—is the effluent holding pit. Manure "lagoons" are

open-air, earthen, or concrete-lined pits that hold millions of gallons of animal waste, contaminated stormwater, and milkhouse wastewater.

Cows used to graze in fields and deposit their waste here and there. Not here.

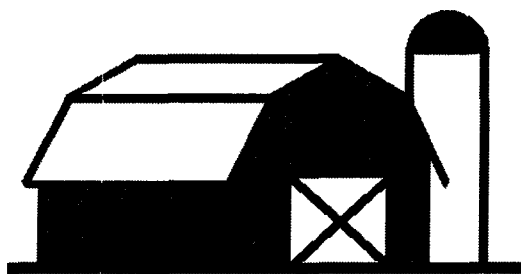
Here, all of the cows are confined year-round, and all the waste is collected in one place. The CAFOs use scrapers and huge quantities of water to pump all feces and urine into pits, lagoons as large as some lakes. Eventually the liquified manure will be trucked or pumped or injected or "spray-irrigated," as they say, onto fields.

Liquified manure stinks. It is not the sweet smell of old-time manure, mixed with straw, composting into soil. Liquid manure steeps for months in the pits; it is potent with pathogens, hormones, antibiotics. Sprayed onto fields, it can flow on top of the ground, or seep through the soil with its contaminants, entering field drainage tiles and streams.

Before European settlement, this part of Michigan was mostly woodland swamp. To farm it, settlers not only cleared the trees, they drained the water—through a complex system of trenches and buried clay tiles set end to end. The tiles formed extensive underground drainage systems, pulling water from the surface and carrying it like any tributary system to ditches or "drains," to streams, to rivers. Whenever liquid pools on the surface of Michigan soil, it quickly drains through these underground tile systems, mostly plastic now, and all that water—clean or contaminated—flows directly to streams.

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, agricultural runoff, of soils, pesticides, and manure, is the major polluter of rivers and streams. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 40 percent of the waters of the United States are too polluted for fishing or swimming. Sixty percent of that pollution comes from agriculture, and with the liquefaction of manure, CAFOs have become the principal contributor to agricultural pollution. More than two trillion pounds of animal waste per year are applied or sprayed onto soils.

Even though alternative waste systems exist, and are common in Europe—composting,



pelletizing for dry application, sterilization and drying—industrial Ag facilities here have resisted any requirement for dry systems or any waste-treatment (systems even small campgrounds are required to install). CAFOs here have not taken the simplest, cheapest steps in pollution prevention: capping tiles when manure is sprayed, monitoring drains.

It is understandable why state agencies and their research arms, the land-grant universities like Michigan State University, have not jumped in to study watershed risks or public health issues. Big research funds come from big Ag, after all, not community environmental groups. “Sustainable” agriculture is a subdivision of most university departments of agriculture, as if only some, not all, agriculture can be sustainable. In fact, in Michigan, the state Department of Agriculture and MSU’s Ag programs have been instrumental in promoting industrial livestock facilities, in particular the freestall barn and liquefied waste systems for dairies. Unfortunately, MSU’s history of denial of environmental risk is notorious.

Forty years ago, in *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson recalled MSU’s spraying of DDT on the campus, obliterating the robin population, “in spite of the assurances of the insecticide people that their sprays were ‘harmless to birds.’” She also recounts the Michigan Department of Agriculture and USDA’s use of pellets of aldrin, “one of the most dangerous” of insecticides in a dusting campaign over Detroit. Officials declared “the dust is harmless to humans and will not hurt plants or pets,” although the bird population was “virtually wiped out,” and cats, rabbits, and fish sickened and died in great numbers.

That’s all in the past, of course, but so are windmills. The legacies of wish and denial complicate current policies and research.

Agriculture has a profoundly compromised

past in this country, where denial and the arguments of economic necessity have supported a range of injustices and degradations, both human and environmental—from the use of slaves in southern agriculture; to the draining of wetlands throughout the Midwest; to the damming of almost every river for irrigation of farmland; to the ongoing irrigation of semi-arid lands for farming, depleting aquifers. Through it all, agriculture claims it *must* do what it does; farmers know best what is best.

AMERICANS HAVE rarely questioned the moral and essential claim of agriculture, to do whatever it wants because it *must* or face ruin. The myth of the *farm*, envisioned in the clip art farm, holds powerful sway, as if the goodness of a creative God and all his righteousness had been shifted to human farmer hands. Who are we to question Agriculture, which plants and grows our daily bread, feeds creatures to be our meat? Adam may have been booted out of the perfect farm, the Garden of Eden, but the clip art farm constructs itself as an alternative (a fallen farm, perhaps, but in a farmer’s control—finally).

Farm-friendly Congress and most state legislatures listen to big Ag interests with devotion and little skepticism. The American Farm Bureau Federation is one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington, fifteenth in *Fortune*’s “Power 25” list for 2001, having moved up six slots just since 2000. Even in the recent farm bill discussions, concessions to big Ag in “conservation” measures led to *more* funding for CAFO lagoon construction, rather than funding for smaller operations or funding for alternative dry-waste systems.

It’s certainly no secret that farming has changed, consolidated, and concentrated. Plenty of attention goes to the corporate guns—Cargill, ADM, Monsanto, Tyson, Smithfield—in articles like William Greider’s “The Last Farm Crisis” (*Nation*, November 20, 2000) and in testimony before Congress from vertical integration analysts like Peter Carstensen, who talk about agricultural anti-trust issues and concerns about a “lawless” market economy.

In rural communities like mine, the main issues are water and the new rural landscape,

which has shifted dramatically in the last four years from many small and varied farm operations to several huge dairy CAFOs, which own or rent more and more of the landscape (paying a premium for manure disposal).

"Rural development" is the catchphrase for this rural industrialization, with tax incentives to industrial Ag facilities, grants for road reconstruction when CAFOs and their trucking rip things up, and massive farm subsidies.

You hear it all the time around here, an outrage to some, a boast from big Ag: "Farmers know how to farm the government."

It's no surprise that whatever big Ag interests touch these days carries a taint in communities like this, a kind of unnatural stench. Even Farmland Preservation, a program to purchase development rights (PDR) and preserve farmland—the type of program that environmentalists as well as farmers usually support—has been sullied here by substantial PDR payments to the largest Ag land speculator. "Preserved" agricultural land can be used in *any* agriculture-related way—huge buildings, lagoons, Ag processing plants.

So instead of farmland being preserved as open field space, all grain and greenery, which people imagine surrounding the clip art farm, in fact it can be fully *developed* and industrialized, with factories and effluent waste-holding systems.

It's a system that has promoted big Ag ownership of thousands of acres, across several townships and two county lines—a feudal shift, with the domain control of agricultural lands in a few hands. PDR money can cycle back, buying up more small farms—more land for more PDR money, or to sell or lease to the CAFOs.

The private interest in the profitability of industrial agriculture often overwhelms the public interest in environmental protection. When people around here—small farmers, teachers, business people, lifelong residents—express concern about the CAFOs' impact on water quality and the risks to watersheds, they are often dismissed by Ag interests as outsiders. Of the tensions in Hudson, one state com-

missioner of agriculture recently said, it was simply, "a conflict between farming and those who desire to move from urban to rural areas."

I'VE LIVED on farms all my life, as a child in Pennsylvania, and in this area of Michigan my entire adult life; I've farmed hay here and restored wetlands on my farm. Still, from the big Ag angle, all people living in rural areas, no matter how long they have lived there or even farmed there, are seen as encroaching on big Ag's agricultural zone.

The property rights of neighbors and the rights to a healthful environment are subsidiary to industrial f—ers' rights. Anything zoned as Agriculture is treated by industrial Ag as a safe zone for the practices they please, no matter who is affected, displaced, harmed, or sickened. Environmentalists are accused of caring more about water than people, and dismissed for that; but even the interests of small farmers are ignored, as are those of niche farmers such as nursery growers, truck farmers, orchard growers, organic farmers. If you're not big Ag, you're nobody. And many states certify these privileged rights of industrial Agriculture with Right to Farm legislation, and in some places with so-called Agricultural Security Zones where farmers cannot be cited for "nuisance" activity (odor, noise, dust).

Around a small farm, of course, freedom to operate the farm business makes sense, and is rarely a nuisance by any definition. Around a CAFO, however, nuisance is a mild word for the intense stench, ammonia and hydrogen sulfide, dust and particulates, truck traffic, all-night flood-lighting, manure sprayed on soil, and manure sprayed on snow. Rural neighbors often have to live with worse-than-any-city conditions of air and water pollution.

Most neighbors finally give up, give in, and sell—if they can. Rural communities suffer division and real loss, as people near CAFOs move out, rather than hazard the respiratory complications that are common among CAFO workers and families. My family doctor, who lived around the corner from the largest facility, left last fall. His family had lived and farmed in the area for seven generations.

The risk to public health and the health of watersheds is no small concern. Agricultural



pollutants and pathogens, excess nutrients, and antibiotic-resistant bacteria threaten water quality across the country. In 1993 in Milwaukee, 111 people died in a *cryptosporidium* outbreak, and 403,000 people were sickened. Maryland's Eastern Shore has had serious problems with the toxic microbe *Pfiesteria piscicida*, causing major fish kills. And last year, in Walkerton, Ontario, seven people died from *E. coli* bacteria in public drinking water supplies. These contaminations have all been linked to pollution from livestock operations.

Even so, at township and county meetings in my area, I still hear denials of any farm fault. My township supervisor, who raises calves for a CAFO, said Walkerton just had a problem with wells.

In this fantasy, every farm is a clip art farm. It's a good, a sacred place. A clip art farm cannot pollute. Farms, even the factory f—s, are hallowed and haloed.

So in Michigan, CAFOs continue to dig waste pits, and then more and deeper pits, even where the water table is near the surface. Clay lagoons leak, concrete lagoons crack.

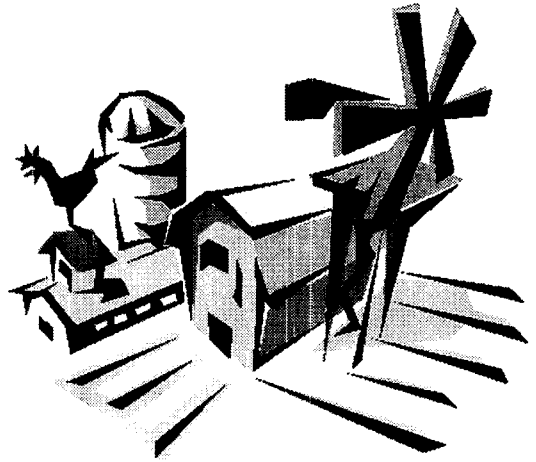
IT'S THE OLDEST lure in America—bigger is better, size matters. In the United States, CAFOs—the biggest operations around—take the bait. It catches them hell, of course. Neighbors get ugly when they can't breathe in their backyards on sunny days, when their kids have to picnic and play inside. When they can't swim in the creek. When their property values evaporate in the stench.

Around my town of Hudson, environmental groups have popped up, including a watershed group; many business people, small farmers, and more recently, church groups, have been working for regulation and inspection of the CAFOs. Michigan still has no permit system, no inspection of lagoons, no requirement for manure management plans. Everything's voluntary. It's f—ing! Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices are "guidelines." They're "recommended."

CAFOs don't even need building permits—they are "agricultural" facilities and are therefore exempt from such regulation. Milking systems are inspected, but there's no regulation or inspection of the tail-end systems. One

CAFO operator needed a permit from the township for a backyard swimming pool; he didn't need a permit from anybody to construct his 1.25 million gallon waste pit.

A surprise EPA inspection of one facility here (one of several federal inspections because Michigan has refused to comply with the Clean Water Act's permit system for CAFOs) found floor drains directly, and illegally, connected to field tiles, which discharged into a



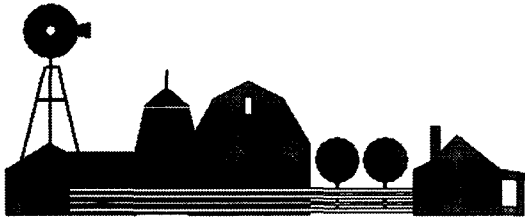
nearby stream. Most Hudson area CAFOs were built by the same Ag construction company—a company spun off with MSU Ag expertise and affiliated with the largest CAFO development corporation. So there's a good chance other facilities have direct tile connections to drains and streams. But who knows? Nobody sees the plans or approves the design; nobody inspects the construction.

For years the state claimed it did not need to comply with the federal Clean Water Act requirement for a permit system because it had a tough "zero discharge" policy. In the last two years, though, despite the state's wishful claim of "zero discharge" to surface waters, we've had fifteen discharge "events"—animal waste over-applied, drained, dumped, or sprayed onto frozen ground—polluted liquid that flowed into drains and streams.

During one discharge, *E. coli* bacteria in a county drain reached 130,000 colonies/100 ml, a contamination level 130 times the acceptable level for partial body contact. The polluted water entered Lime Creek; then Bean Creek;

and on to the state of Ohio, where the city of Archbold takes its drinking water; and on to the Tiffin River, where the town of Defiance takes its drinking water; and into the Maumee River, outletting into Lake Erie at Toledo.

Seven CAFOs were ordered to stop the discharges. Some complied, some didn't. So far, there have been no penalties. Not one has been



fined, even though one of the discharges sent four hundred thousand gallons of manure down a drain to Bear Creek. The Department of Environmental Quality estimated that twelve million gallons of polluted water entered Lake Hudson, a state park with a swimming beach.

AG PEOPLE AND politicians have to look way back, back to Neverland, or they have to be as nostalgic as clip art designers, to call farmers "the true conservationists," as both Al Gore and George W. Bush did in the last campaign. There's a strange fear, like the fear of loss of faith, to admit that farmers are fallible.

American Agribusiness, Ag producer associations, and the American Farm Bureau Federation, in particular, lobby hard with the fantasy of the clip art farm. Without it, they'd have to admit that farming is a business, and a CAFO is an industrial facility. They'd have to acknowledge that farmers are human beings, who need, like the rest of humanity, not just voluntary guidelines, but laws.

Infallibility is a difficult claim to make for anybody. Farmers have managed to walk on water for about a hundred years—literally, in Michigan, by draining wetlands. But that's not much more than a trick, and they're being outed. They're just business folks working the resources—some decent, some money-grubbing, most no more committed to preserving the environment than are mining companies topping mountains in West Virginia.

The nationwide proliferation of animal fac-

ories has turned many livestock farmers into operations officers, business managers. They may wear the John Deere cap, but they mostly don't drive the tractor. These f—ers don't really farm.

Across the new rural landscape, that noise you hear is the resounding crack in the old mythology.

When operations get CAFO-sized, farmers can't work all the fields, can't know all the ground directly. They buy up other farmers' land, they bulk up their holdings. They hire low-wage laborers or sub-contractors, like the Tail-End haulers with their tankers, to truck manure to remote fields. Chances are those drivers have never seen the fields before, and certainly never tilled them. Not many CAFOs have the comprehensive "nutrient management" plans that calculate how much or how little manure can be applied on particular soils with particular crops, to function as fertilizer, and not waste. In Michigan, the plans are voluntary. Without such plans, which include manure-testing and soil-testing, manure application is guesswork.

Often, it's plain old illegal waste disposal.

One CAFO operator, relocated from the Netherlands, wrote with enthusiasm about how farming was finally a living, rather than a way of life.

And why not? Lots of folks like to have a life as well as a job, to go on cruises.

But as managers of industrial facilities, they hang on to that word *farmer* and the fantasy of the *farm*.

The myth isn't flimsy. It has two powerful drivers—there's the "farm" (unlike factory) relief from regulation. And maybe more powerful, "farmers" receive farm subsidies, a welfare system that dwarfs any assistance offered to anyone else in this country.

"Farmers" receive state and federal subsidies, loan guarantees, and outright payments beyond other interest groups' dreams, payments that few taxpayers—if they knew—would support. The bigger the farms, the more industrial their facilities, the more aid they get. The numbers add up.

Farmers don't like welfare, of course. Welfare mothers? Slackers! Abusers of the system. Welfare farmers? Oh, no, no such thing. This

in spite of billions of dollars for farm subsidies—seventy-one billion dollars over the last four years.

Food may be cheap on the shelf, but look where we pay for it: milk price-support money, economic development money (a new \$1.15 million dollar road to the door of one CAFO, here in Michigan), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) grants, “conservation practice” money (lagoon, manure injector subsidies), production flexibility contracts, market loss assistance, loan deficiency payments. The list goes on.



In Hudson, the biggest big Ag guy received \$923,980 in U.S. Department of Agriculture farm subsidies for 1996-2000, with huge increases each year. In 2000 alone, he received federal checks for \$300,473. And that number doesn't include the PDR check he got for \$794,957 from the state Department of Agriculture, for Farmland Preservation. More than one million dollars to one f—er last year. Elsewhere in the United States, farm subsidy payments reached the multi-millions for individual producers. Cheap food?

Subsidies and payments have become so dear to the Ag industry that they can't see those checks in the mail as welfare checks. No, they say, a farmer's farmwork on a farm is good, even godly. Patriotic. Farming is in the economic interest, in the *national interest*, in the global interest.

And if anybody suggests otherwise, Ag people call in the grand defense. “If America wants cheap food . . .” “If you had to pay what food costs...” or “If we're going to beat world hunger...” and, as big as it gets, the first and last word: “If we're going to *feed the world*...”

Well, why should we feed the world any more than we clothe it or shingle all the world's roofs? Food is a business, one business, in the world's survival.

You'd think farmers were all Jesus, with the loaves and fishes, not human beings with self-

aggrandizing wishes.

Other industrialized countries in the world, such as France and Japan, are willing to pay more for food to protect their water and to protect family operations. Because of water quality concerns, the Netherlands bought out many dairy operations and limited the size of others. Hundreds of Dutch farmers have re-located in the United States (Texas, Idaho, Washington, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan—most of the CAFOs near Hudson are Dutch operations), with facilities ten to fifty times larger than those they left.

“It's been a steep learning curve,” one Ag official admitted at a local information session.

That's f—ing these days! On-the-job training in Hudson, Michigan—with ten thousand cows and two hundred million gallons of untreated, liquefied animal waste each year on the soils, in the watershed.

Water, air, soil—the natural resources of sustainable farming and all life—have been segmented, wrenched apart, in industrialized agriculture.

THE ROAD WHERE I live is a dirt road like many in Michigan. Two years ago, the County Road Commission decided to widen and clear the entire right-of-way of trees and shrubs. It brought in huge hydro-hoes to rip down the trees, including the two big maples in my front yard. When the road crews piled my trees and heaps of others on two-story high piles and set them on fire, I called up the county road commissioner who lives down the road and who also happens to be a CAFO operator.

We stood in the middle of the road, and looked at the machines, the torn-up swath sixty feet wide, at the trees on fire, the smoke rolling, the mud, the whole mess. It looked like hell. And I said so.

“When I look down this road,” he said, “I see a brighter future.”

Many days now, when the CAFOs are emptying lagoons, and Tail-End tankers of liquid manure roar up and down this road, I count the trucks as they go by, every twenty minutes, hour after hour.

This is the new rural landscape. If you're outside a city, look around—it's not hard to tell when you're near animal confinement facili-

ties. You will not see animals. You will see bulldozers, tiling machines, the bunkers with black plastic, the manure tankers. If you fly across the country, look down and notice the metallic glints, the clustered lines and rectangles, reflections off the long metal roofs of the thousands and thousands of animal factories our taxes support, the waste pits we subsidize.

And under those roofs, the factory meat and milk we pay for through the nose.

A brighter future? Contaminated water?

Fouled air? We pay all this for what, cheap cheese?

In the new rural landscape, it's a shock to see how far big Ag has booted itself from the natural world. How far this f—ing industry has fallen. ●

JANET KAUFFMAN's most recent books include *Characters on the Loose* and *Rot*. She has published numerous articles on land use, drainage, and watershed issues.



The most creative and challenging news magazine on the American left.
—Cornel West

In These Times is a rare beacon of truth-telling amid that swamp of political propaganda known as the media. It delivers the hard news one might expect from a free press. It explains the subtext for the continuing scandal of our decayed democracy. Read it—you will be regularly shocked by what the other journals leave out.

—WILLIAM GREIDER

Become an **In These Times** subscriber today!

1 full year
(24 issues)
for only

\$19.95

Mail to:
In These Times Customer Service
308 Hitt St. • Mt. Morris, IL 61054
Or call 1-800-827-0270

NAME (PLEASE PRINT) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY / STATE / ZIP _____

CARD NUMBER / EXP. DATE _____

SIGNATURE _____

www.inthesetimes.com

AMST 02

Corporate Crime and Voting Rights

Stephen J. Fortunato, Jr.

IF A DRUG-ADDICTED person with a short criminal record of petty street crimes is arrested and convicted for shoplifting and at the same time is also convicted of possessing a few grams of cocaine, that person will likely spend several years in prison followed by five or ten years on probation. Following release from prison, the ex-felon will be unable to vote in a majority of states until the probationary term expires, and then only after weaving through a difficult, often impossible, bureaucratic maze. In ten states, voting rights are never restored after a felony conviction; and if the conviction takes place in a federal court, a presidential pardon may be the only way to restore the vote, but this is an improbability if one is not well connected.

On the other hand, if a person who occupies a position of prestige and command in a large corporation commits transgressions that are on a grander scale than those of the average street criminal, such as releasing defective, life-threatening products into the marketplace or defiling the environment by dumping chemicals into a river, the chances of that person's going to prison are virtually nil. Nothing will be done by any law enforcement agency to prohibit the corporate official—or the corporation—from participating in the electoral process. The official will remain free not only to vote but—along with his or her corporate employer—to lobby state and federal officials and to contribute large sums of money to candidates, political parties, and political action committees. No state or federal laws forbid such electioneering activities, no matter how criminal the corporation.

Of the many baseless premises and outright myths that infuse the criminal justice system,

none is more senseless or pernicious than the notion that revoking the right to vote of a person who has completed a prison sentence after conviction for a felony ensures the “purity” of the electoral process. Although not as brutally final as capital punishment or as gratuitously cruel as the incarceration of a person for addiction to drugs, the obliteration of the franchise of a person who has completed “hard time” is every bit as illogical and pointless. If one of the objectives of incarceration is the rehabilitation of the convict so that he or she can rejoin society as a constructive, contributing individual, marginalizing the marginalized even more is, to say the least, counterproductive.

The uneven but pervasive disenfranchisement found in forty-eight states (Maine and Vermont are the exceptions) and in the federal system adds to political impotence and social degradation in poor—especially African-American—communities. Ten states disenfranchise felons for life, thirty-five states prevent parolees from voting, and twenty-nine states forbid voting by persons on probation for a felony conviction. Relying on figures and laws collated by Jeff Manza, Christopher Uggen, and Marcus Britton of the University of Minnesota and Northwestern University, the federal task force of the National Commission on Election Reform (NCER) concluded that at the present time 4.2 million people have lost the right to vote, permanently or temporarily, because of current or prior felony convictions. The NCER noted the disparate impact of disenfranchisement on the African-American community: “Nearly 7 percent of black Americans cannot participate in the electoral process because of a felony conviction.”

Similarly, the Sentencing Project of Human Rights Watch, drawing upon many of the studies the NCER used, concluded in a report published in 1998 that 3.9 million citizens were disenfranchised as a result of a felony conviction.

tion “including over one million who have fully completed their sentences.” Regarding the calamitous impact of disenfranchisement laws in the black community, the Sentencing Project noted that “13 percent of African American men—1.4 million—are disenfranchised, representing just over one-third (36 percent) of the total disenfranchised population” The Project concluded ominously: “If current trends continue, the rate of disenfranchisement for black men could reach forty percent in the states that disenfranchise ex-offenders.” No surprise here, as blacks, who make up slightly more than 12 percent of the United States population, are 50 percent of the nation’s two million prison inmates.

The impact of disenfranchisement will vary depending on the size and character of the voting venue—city council district, small town, large city, congressional district, and so on—as well as the racial makeup of the area. A *Newsweek* cover story titled *America’s Prison Generation* (November 13, 2000) showed that in at least nine states—including the Bush country of Texas and Florida—more than 20 percent of black males are temporarily or permanently banned from voting due to a felony conviction. In populous states such as New York and California, between 5 percent and 10 percent of black males are temporarily or permanently banned from the polls.

It has been widely reported that the penchant in Florida for purifying voting lists by excising the names of convicted felons resulted ultimately in the election of George W. Bush. An editorial in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* of June 4, 2001, noted this electoral race card: “Now a study also shows that the data used to purge felons from Florida’s voting rolls was flawed, resulting in the denial of the right to vote to 1,104 legitimate voters who have never been convicted of felonies. That’s almost twice as many votes as the 537 ‘official’ margin of victory that gave George W. Bush Florida’s electoral votes and the White House. Forty-two percent of those on the inaccurate list were African American.”

Voting Rights and Corporate Criminals

The denial of the right to vote to a citizen who has rejoined the community after having com-

pleted prison time, while absurd in itself, appears even more egregious when measured against the continued and influential participation of corporate criminals in the political process.

Corporate criminals, whether they knowingly release defective and dangerous products into the marketplace, disregard environmental regulations, or “cook” the books to manipulate stock prices, after paying their fines, or occasionally doing time, remain free to lobby elected and appointed officials and to donate huge sums of money to political parties and activist groups that seek to influence the outcome of elections.

However attenuated it may be in the context of prevailing economic arrangements and campaign finance laws, the vote remains to the average citizen, including the average ex-convict released with little money and few skills back into the community, as one of only a few options through which political preferences can be expressed. (It is worth noting that the African-American community votes more as a bloc than the Irish, the Italians, or any other ethnic or racial group.)

THE SITUATION is markedly different for the corporate criminal. They and their underlings, who cause financial ruin to thousands of people, inflict injuries on many and sometimes death, and befoul the environment, rarely see the inside of a prison, as their transgressions are treated as either misdemeanors or civil matters. For the few who do lose the right to vote, it is a minor and inconsequential penalty, for their power resides in their personal wealth and that of their corporation. Though the majority of states eliminate permanently or temporarily a felon’s right to vote, neither Congress nor any of the states has enacted laws prohibiting a convicted corporation or a convicted corporate officer from continued financial participation in the political system or from sending minions to Washington or state houses to lobby. In short, a criminal corporation’s involvement in electoral politics, both during an election and between elections, remains unabated regardless of any court verdict of civil or criminal liability.

When one compares the effects of corpo-

rate crime with those of street crime and also considers the respective punishments and post-incarceration burdens, it is apparent that the machinery of the capitalist electioneering system has erected a class barrier every bit as impregnable as a prison wall. The typical street criminal, generally ill-schooled, unskilled, and impoverished, acts out of financial desperation and steals or out of spiritual desperation and narcotizes himself, resulting in banishment from the voting booth. The corporate criminal, on the other hand, is generally well-fed, well-educated, and obscenely overpaid, and intentionally concocts socially pervasive and damaging schemes to satisfy his greed. Nonetheless, this criminal's money is always welcome, and he or she is never excluded by legal sanctions from the corridors of political power.

SCHOLARS AND CRITICS have known for some time that the actual social cost of corporate crime far exceeds that of so-called street crime. In 1972, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimated that white-collar crimes cost the economy approximately forty billion dollars a year, which was almost 700 percent higher than the Federal Bureau of Investigation's estimate of six billion dollars in goods and cash stolen by street criminals engaged in larceny, robbery, and burglary. There is no reason to believe that this disparity regarding the consequences of boardroom versus street criminal activity has narrowed. In his insightful and meticulously researched 1999 book, *Capital Crimes*, George Winslow puts annual losses attributable to corporate crime and white-collar fraud at a minimum of two hundred billion dollars.

When we look at why the street criminal is stripped of an already feeble vote while the white-collar criminal retains the rights to lobby and make political contributions, we should focus on the consequences of the different criminal behaviors. Those of the former usually have one victim, namely the owner of the stolen television or automobile, the store keeper, and so on; and though the loss to that individual is often significant in monetary terms and invariably felt to be a painful violation, only in the aggregate of all burglaries, or all shopliftings, are there social consequences,

such as the increased need for security and higher insurance premiums. On the other hand, the actions of the corporate criminal spray like a shotgun shell toward a flock of victims, sometimes known and sometimes unknown to the perpetrator. When it touches its multiple victims, be they shareholders, drivers of defective automobiles, or fishers in polluted streams or bays, the corporate crime always wreaks a costly havoc.

A case in point is Exxon, the oil giant recently merged with Mobil, which suffered only minimal collateral financial damage as a result of its criminal negligence in the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Alaska. While financing a decade of legal maneuvers designed to avoid its responsibility to the people and land it had injured, Exxon remained an active player in the political game. From January of 1995 through June 30 of 2000, Exxon contributed \$382,015 to Democrats and \$2,531,690 to Republicans. The Common Cause Web site shows Exxon Mobil contributing \$45,000 to Democrats and \$330,000 to the Republicans at the national party level in the 1999-2000 election cycle. None of Exxon's executives, managers, or planners lost the right to vote as a result of the oil spill and its devastation; but had they been punished with that sanction, what would the loss of a dozen votes have been to Republicans compared to the two- and-one-half million dollars they could spend on television advertisements soliciting hundreds of thousands of votes?

The *Exxon Valdez* spill was one of those few instances of corporate criminality and social irresponsibility widely covered by the media, not because the dominant media outlets have it in for oil companies or that during 1989 the press experienced a surge of responsibility, but because the nature of the crime lent itself to the all important "visuals" that television loves to display. Birds and otters covered in oil televise well and are a welcome change from well-scrubbed talking faces. Less photogenic crimes remain buried in the financial print media.

For example, the *Wall Street Journal* of June 20, 2001, reported that the premier accounting and auditing firm of Arthur Andersen had agreed to settle a federal court fraud claim brought by the Securities and Exchange Commission for seven million dollars and that three

of its partners would pay fines of \$30,000 to \$50,000. Moreover, these three, plus an additional partner, would not do "accounting work for public companies for a period of one to five years." The accounting firm had been charged with "improper accounting practices that inflated the garbage-hauling concern's [Waste Management Inc.'s] earnings." Improper accounting practices, especially regarding earnings, can lead the public to invest in companies with unsound foundations and a camouflaged risk of financial loss. As is often the case with corporate criminals, Arthur Andersen and its partners were permitted to remain mute and neither admit nor deny the fraud allegations. The *Wall Street Journal* quoted the spin put on the matter by the company's managing partner: "The SEC has not questioned the underlying quality or effectiveness of our overall audit methodology, nor has the SEC limited our ability to conduct audits for other public companies."

Favored Treatment?

Undaunted by its problems and with no laws to bar it and its executives from participating in the political process, Arthur Andersen and its affiliate companies contributed \$82,500 to Democrats and \$370,300 to Republicans for the 2000 election campaign according to Common Cause. (Yes, this is the same Arthur Andersen that paid \$110 million as a civil settlement for "accounting improprieties and disclosure failures" related to the Sunbeam collapse and that is a central player in the Enron scandal.) One does not have to be a cynic to ask whether the Andersen propensity for smoke-and-mirrors' accounting practices served as a recommendation to the chieftains at Enron. To date, the government's treatment of both Enron and Andersen shows the usual kid-gloves treatment of the economic elite. The Associated Press reported on March 23, 2002, that Paul Volcker, the former chair of the Federal Reserve Board and Andersen's purported rescuer, has proposed that all current federal indictments against Andersen—meaning the relatively mild charges of obstructing justice (for shredding documents)—must be dismissed if Andersen is to be properly reorganized in order to survive. Moreover, I am aware

of no government official or mass media pundit who has suggested the obvious applicability of the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) to Enron and Andersen executives. If half the news accounts imputing the falsification of figures and required disclosures are true—and assuming that this false information was disseminated through the United States mail or over telephones, the Internet, and television to employees of the company investing in Enron's pension fund, potential stock purchasers, and government regulators—a first-year law student could draft a RICO indictment.

Occasionally, a mega corporation will be charged in a criminal proceeding rather than in the more benign—and appropriately named—civil action. In December of 2000, a subsidiary of the pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson pleaded guilty to criminal charges for, in the words of the *New York Times*, "selling defective blood glucose monitoring devices to diabetics and submitting false information about the problems to federal regulators." For this, the subsidiary, LifeScan, paid fines totaling sixty million dollars. Ralph S. Larson, the chair of Johnson & Johnson, matched Arthur Andersen's spin: "We fully acknowledge those errors and sincerely apologize for them. We are committed to learning from this experience." No doubt the swindled diabetics were touched by these condolences.

More of a tightwad than some of its corporate friends, Johnson & Johnson gave a paltry \$25,000 to Democrats and \$20,600 to the Republicans for the 2000 election. But the point is not the amounts involved, although the total sums of corporate contributions dominate and shape election outcomes and national policies. What is important as we consider the disenfranchisement of four million people is that corporations and the people who serve them face no similar exclusion from the political process.

Rigged Casino

Although it is rare for corporate officials to end up in jail for doing their masters' bidding, three former executives of Archer Daniel's Midland did receive prison sentences ranging up to two and a half years for attempting to fix feed-ad-

ditive prices worldwide. The executives may have lost their right to vote, but during the 1990s, as this case unfolded, an unbowed Archer Daniel's Midland contributed \$4.7 million to federal lawmakers, including such prominent patrons as Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle.

The list of corporate transgressors is endless, and the scale of their looting is staggering. Take the case of the Prudential Insurance Company, the one that promotes itself as having all the strength and integrity of the Rock of Gibraltar. For more than a ten-year period stretching from January 1, 1982, to December 31, 1995, Prudential bilked its customers out of hundreds of millions of dollars by misrepresenting the true cost and value of policies it sold them. When the fraudulent scheme was brought to light, Prudential paid more than fifty million dollars to state regulators and twenty million dollars to the National Association of Securities' Dealers. Payback came when Prudential settled a class action suit requiring it to repay its customers \$2.8 billion. Not surprisingly, Prudential is as bold as its corporate friends. Common Cause reports that in the 1999-2000 election cycle, Prudential and its affiliates contributed \$366,500 to Democrats and \$431,125 to Republicans.

These few shameful stories—and there are many more—show that whatever civil or criminal penalties and fines corporate America encounters each year, they are simply inconvenient potholes on the road to maximizing profits that have no impact on a corporation's gift-giving or lobbying. In short, the game of electoral politics is rigged in favor of the casino, and the casino is corporate America and the candidates it sponsors at election time and succors in between.

As bleak as the electoral landscape is, now may be a ripe time for activists to push at the state house level for reform of this situation and the restoration of voting rights to persons who have completed their sentences and are not in prison. The late Speaker of the House Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neil's oft-quoted adage that "all politics is local" is nowhere more true than in legislation regarding the franchise. Congress, under the Constitution, defers almost exclusive authority to the states for the enactment

of laws and rules governing a voter's qualifications, the scheme of primaries and elections, vote recounts, and so on. A tiny crumb of official recognition of the problem is found in the report of the task force of the National Commission on Election Reform, established as a response to the 2000 election fiasco, which recommends among other things, that "[e]ach state should allow for restoration of voting rights to otherwise eligible citizens who have been convicted of a felony once they have fully served their sentence, including any term of probation or parole."

A similar proposal is found in the report of state election officials who make up the National Task Force on Election Reform, which also was created after the November 2000 debacle. After declaring in bold type that "America's election system is **NOT** in crisis," the state officials mirrored the NCER, declaring that "State laws should be changed to allow restoration of voting rights upon pardon or full completion of a sentence (incarceration, probation, parole, restitution, etc.)."

THESE POLICY recommendations acknowledge the problem, but opt for a solution that is timid to the point of being farcical. Most people who are sentenced to jail for felonies return to the community with suspended sentences and substantial terms of probation. Needless to say, at the time the sentence is imposed, the defendant and defense counsel are thinking little about a future probationary time but are concentrating all their energies and forensic skills on minimizing the actual time in prison. The restoration of voting rights after the completion of a probationary period would be an improvement in the states with lifetime bans on felons' voting, but would not have any significant impact in poor communities, given the numbers of people currently disenfranchised and walking the streets while on parole or probation.

What we need is federal and state legislation modeled after the Civic Participation and Rehabilitation Act of 1999 sponsored by Representative John Conyers (D-Mich.) and twenty-six other, mostly African-American, members of the House of Representatives. That legislation went nowhere, but it spoke

to the point: "The right of an individual who is a citizen of the United States to vote in any election for Federal office shall not be denied or abridged because that individual has been convicted of a criminal offense unless such individual is serving a felony sentence in a correctional institution or facility at the time of the election." In other words, if you are free to be on the street, you should be free to vote.

Civil rights advocates and community activists pushing for voting restoration legislation should vigorously point out to legislators the unconscionably disparate treatment of the street felon and the corporate criminal. One can only hope that substantial numbers of

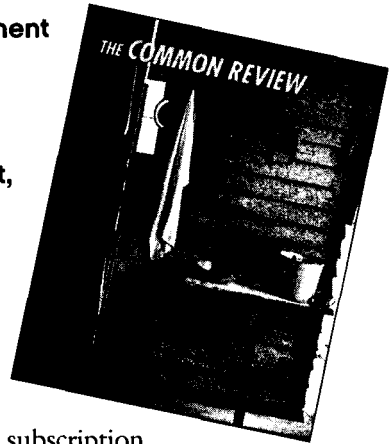
elected officials, whether on the two coasts or in George W.'s "heartland," are angered enough by the dominance of money in local and national politics and the obscenely bloated salaries of corporate executives, professional athletes, celebrity news anchors, and the like to open the voting booth to the disenfranchised even if the former prisoner is not going to attend a thousand-dollar-a-plate political bash any time soon. ●

STEPHEN J. FORTUNATO, JR., is an assistant justice of the Rhode Island Superior Court. His essays and reviews have appeared in such publications as the *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics*, *Judicature*, and *Privacy Journal*.

THE COMMON REVIEW

The magazine of the Great Books Foundation

The task of cultural and intellectual engagement cannot stop with yesterday's news—or even yesterday's classics. With contributors including Michael Bérubé, Eugene Goodheart, Regina Barreca, Michael Kimmel, and Meredith Small, *The Common Review* aims to bridge the gap between academe and the general marketplace of ideas.



THE COMMON REVIEW is available at bookstores or by subscription.

One year (4 issues) is only \$12. To subscribe, call 1-800-222-5870 or e-mail tcr@greatbooks.org. Ask how you can become a member of the Foundation and receive a free one-year subscription.



The Great Books Foundation
35 East Wacker Drive, Suite 2300
Chicago, IL 60601-2298
www.greatbooks.org

That Seventies Show

Travels with Older Feminists

Jennifer Baumgardner

ON A BLUSTERY DAY this past April, I sat in Barnard College's Altschul Hall among fifty accomplished feminists in their fifties and sixties, ten or so students, and two high-schoolers for the annual Veteran Feminists of America meeting. Part conference and part award ceremony, the event is a look back at the early days of the modern women's movement, starring the women who led the charge of the second wave. Feminine-mystique buster Betty Friedan was there, as was zipless-fuck creator Erica Jong. Different-voice researcher Carol Gilligan stopped in for the dinner to receive her medal. Seven of the original thirteen *Our Bodies, Our-Selves* collective stood with their arms around each other on the dais, recalling the days when they sat at a kitchen table hammering out the original feminist health bible. Many of the women at the event spoke of having been through hell and euphoria, having known intense excitement and bravery and loss, which is why they use the somewhat tongue-in-cheek term "veteran," connoting one who served in a war, instead of the less bloody-sounding "pioneer" or "trailblazer" or (*ahem*) "foremother." In other words, these women enlisted in the revolution, and they have the scars to prove they were there.

I have attended this meeting for the last four years as a guest of Barbara Seaman, who wrote *The Doctors' Case Against the Pill* and *Free and Female*, among other influential books. I'm not a pioneer of the second wave but a person who was raised with the benefits of feminism. This year was a salute to the writers of the movement, and at the nonfiction panel it was suggested that no big, ground-breaking feminist books were being written today. Su-

san Brownmiller, author of *Against Our Will* and, recently, *In Our Time*, argued that this was because so much was unearthed by the second wave that it was next to impossible to find a hot, profound topic that would make millions of women exclaim "Wait, she's writing about me!" Letty Cottin Pogrebin, former editor of *Ms.* magazine and co-creator of *Free to Be . . . You and Me*, added that it was also due to the kind of feminism practiced by the daughters of the second wave, which she characterized as very individualistic, concerned with culture rather than politics. (This was seconded by sister panelists Brownmiller and Phyllis Chesler, author of *Women and Madness* and, now, *Woman's Inhumanity to Woman*.)

The theory that the important books were ones written roughly between 1964 (*The Feminine Mystique*) and 1975 (*Against Our Will*) struck me as provocative and inaccurate. I am the co-author of a book about the current state of feminism, and I'm in the process of writing two more books along feminist lines, so I have a personal stake in resisting the news that all the good writing has been done. Ironically, I had embarked a few years before on a grand plan to bring out some of the classics of the second wave. I focused on out-of-print books that I thought were ignored by the publishing industry and therefore unavailable to my generation. In pitching the Feminist Classics series, I was asked to prove that those important feminist books (written and trumpeted by the vets) were, well . . . relevant.

On a personal level, I wanted some role in preserving the legacy of second wave feminism. That compulsion can be traced back to my first job after college, in the editorial department at *Ms.* *Ms.* didn't reflect the feminism I saw in my own life, the *de facto* feminism of having been raised in a more liberated time, when ground-breaking acts come from sheer confidence, freedom, and a sense of entitlement and

not from consciousness raising groups and mass protests. Ms. didn't direct itself to an audience raised with both Maybelline ads and critiques of make-up. Nonetheless, I was fascinated by what I then perceived to be the "real" women's liberationists, and I was in the privileged position of meeting many of these veterans. It was heady stuff.

One night during the spring of 1995, I attended a gathering for the writer Susan Swan in a Greenwich Village bar when I met Karen Durbin, now the film critic for *Elle*, who was part of the later crest of the second wave. In 1995, she was the editor-in-chief (first and only woman in that job) at the *Village Voice*, the once-influential soapbox for the lefty counterculture. We talked about whether young women really had a grasp of feminism's theory and history. I recall Karen's saying something like this: *Look, you've got to read the big books of the second wave. Even if you spit 99 percent of them out, reading those books is critical.* So Karen wasn't insisting that I swallow everything the seventies feminists came up with. She was suggesting that my generation hadn't read feminism's foundational books and thus was unable to build on them. That was an epiphany.

I started reading: from *Sexual Politics* to *Pornography* to *In A Different Voice*; from *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill* to *Against Our Will* to *Vaginal Politics*. I read the novels (*Burning Questions*, *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*, *The Women's Room*, *Fear of Flying*). I bought out-of-print books from street vendors who displayed their wares on card tables on Avenue A. I read the books written about the women who jump-started the radical second wave, like *Personal Politics* and *Daring to Be Bad*. I organized intergenerational readings and wrote in my magazine articles about events that occurred before I was born. I revisited the Miss America Protest of the late 1960s and the fight over the Equal Rights Amendment, reviewed the twenty-fifth-anniversary edition of *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*, wrote about the S.C.U.M. *Manifesto*.

Then in 1998, I had the Feminist Classics idea. It seemed like a good idea back then—and deceptively straightforward. I (a twenty-eight-year-old feminist writer) noticed that most of the major classics of the second wave

were out of print. I was outraged. *Would Das Kapital ever be remaindered? Does anyone have to scour the Internet to find the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.?* I would lobby to get these books back in print so my generation could read them and take the revolution to the next level.

"Mary Wollstonecraft wrote the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792; a few years later it was out of print and, with it, the first challenge—the foundation—of feminist intellectual tradition," began my 1998 proposal to Farrar, Straus & Giroux. "As a writer working on a book about feminism, I don't care if the seminal texts of the second wave aren't on lists of influential books—I'd be happy if they were in print. *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett, *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer, and *The Dialectic of Sex* by Shulamith Firestone are all dead. (And the works of lesser-known influential thinkers such as Ti-Grace Atkinson and Jill Johnston? Forget about it.)"

I approached a dozen younger feminists and asked them to lend quotes to bolster my case. "It's amazing that Firestone took on Marx—how bold," said Kathleen Hanna, a founder of riot grrrl and lead singer of Le Tigre. Susan Faludi threw her weight behind the project. "If there is a sense in the industry that younger women wouldn't be influenced by these books," she said, "it's a self-fulfilling prophecy: they certainly won't if the books aren't available."

MY AGENT, also twenty-eight, was eager to help out in what was essentially *pro bono* work. We approached the editor I was working with on my feminist book (who also happened to be under thirty). She went for it. What happened next was a roller coaster ride of frustration, leading to what I think of now as "Lessons in Feminism."

Lesson # 1: Just because a writer is a feminist doesn't mean she doesn't (or shouldn't) have an ego.

I approached Millett first. She had written an article that year in the now-defunct *On the Issues* about how she couldn't get a teaching job anywhere and almost all her books were out of print, including the 1970 classic *Sexual Politics*. That book was the first major example of something routinely done now: the parsing

of a beloved cultural creation for its misogyny. The lens she held up to D.H. Lawrence and Norman Mailer is now almost automatically applied to work from such varied artists as Woody Allen and Eminem. When we spoke, Millett was interested in my classics proposal but noted again that *all* her books were out of print. She was sick of being reduced to the first book of her career (her Ph.D. dissertation, for God's sake) and wanted a publisher to commit to doing at least four of her books. I quickly read *Sita, Flying*, and the *Loony Bin Trip* and made the case to Farrar, Straus & Giroux. No dice, so no dice. The idea of getting classics out for my generation wasn't enough inducement for Millett. Though I was disappointed, I could hardly blame her. No points for taking less than you think you deserve.

Lesson #2: Just because a second-wave feminist is old enough to be my mother doesn't mean that she is my mother.

My next call was to Shulamith Firestone, who has been very reclusive after her 1970 *Dialectic of Sex*. Like Millett, she wrote her first book at twenty-five and had already founded and left several influential New York feminist groups such as Redstockings and New York Radical Feminists by the time it was published. *Dialectic* had a tight, ambitious, radical argument. "The missing link between Marx and Freud," was how it was billed on the back cover. The point of feminism, Firestone argued, was to "overthrow the oldest, most rigid" class system—caste based on sex. The book was a bestseller, but Firestone left the movement soon after it came out and fell off everyone's radar. In 1998, she published a lovely, tiny book of disturbing vignettes about people with mental illnesses called *Airless Spaces*. She called me when the book came out to see if I would review it. I seized the moment to get her involved in the classics project. After many phone calls with me, my agent, and the editor, in which we agreed to very specific terms (no new introduction, the same artwork as the 1970 edition, no publicity responsibilities on her end), Firestone agreed to participate. My agent negotiated for months to get the rights to *Dialectic* back from William Morrow.

Days before she was to sign the contract, Firestone called and said, Sorry for the trouble,

but she had decided she no longer wanted the book to come out. It hadn't made her life any better when it came out originally, and she didn't want to go through any of that shit again. ("Refusing a career as a professional feminist, Shulamith Firestone found herself in an 'airless space,' approximately since the publication of her first book *The Dialectic of Sex*" reads the back cover of *Airless Spaces*.) I sputtered something about how my generation should have access to the book, that it could change lives and consciousness, and didn't she *care about that*?

No, frankly, she didn't. "If your generation really wants it, there are a few old copies available on Amazon.com," she said. "I don't feel a responsibility to bring out the book just because you want it. I'm very sorry."

There had been so much back and forth, months and months of negotiating these tricky concessions, hours of phone calls and then *poof!* It was over. I couldn't believe that I thought it was the patriarchal publishing industry keeping these books out of younger feminists' hands when, in a way, it was the authors themselves. As I came to terms with the fact that my vision for a series of feminist classics wasn't going to be realized, I started to see the lesson in Firestone's actions. Her book was a challenge to the inevitability of the female role, especially that of the mother who has to forgo her own needs by constantly privileging the needs of her progeny. It's true that men spend significant amounts of time mentoring other men—it's the positive side of the old boys network—but men don't feel that they owe other men this. With women, perhaps because

ON BOARD

With this issue of *Dissent*, Jeffrey C. Isaac joins the editorial board. Jeff teaches political theory at the University of Indiana in Bloomington. His books include *Power and Marxist Theory* (1987), *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (1992), and *Democracy in Dark Times* (1998). He was written frequently for *Dissent* on theoretical questions and on contemporary campus politics, in which he is actively engaged.

we've only recently entered the public sphere, there is a sense that mentoring and torch-passing steal from one's own hard-won store of power.

Lesson #3 Do it yourself.

By saying that she wasn't going to give me or my generation any intellectual nourishment—what I perceived as our inheritance, our due—Firestone spurred me to look at myself and my own book to fill that role. The book I was writing with Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future*, would have to be an “important feminist book,” if I thought the world needed such work so badly.

Lesson #4: Feminism means rejecting received wisdom.

Which brings me to the challenge implied by the Veteran Feminists panel: are today's feminist books important? Obviously, I think so. And although we may not be writing the “first” book about rape or the “first” nonsexist children's book, we *are* writing the books taught in women's studies programs across the nation. We are writing the books (and zines and songs) that girls and women and guys pick up and say, “I didn't realize that I was a feminist until I read your book” (or zine or song, and so on). We are, most critically, writing the first feminist books written by people raised with feminism “in the water,” as we say in *Manifesta*. Amy and I sought to describe the feminism we saw every day in our peers. In doing so, we had to shake off the received wisdom of current feminism. We had to discard the idea that the only important books were “radical” ones in which patriarchy was the problem, where women defining themselves as a “class” was the clear solution. We had to repudiate the myth that younger people rejected feminism itself, and point out that they (we) may be rejecting a definition of feminism coined in another time.

There is clear value in the past—especially the singular history of the second wave, when so much changed so rapidly. In a relatively few years, these women went from back-alley butchers to legal abortions, from girl writers never getting assignments to important journalists and authors. By the end of the seventies, there were female firefighters and words for—thus acknowledgment of—date rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence.

There was a women's music scene and a national feminist magazine.

But there is even more value in the present. *Manifesta* was published in October 2000 and is now taught at hundreds of schools from Harvard to Winona State, from Lynwood Alternative High School in Ohio to McGill University in Canada. There are indeed feminist books published right now (*Slut!*, *Cunt*, *Don't Believe the Hype*, *Listen Up*, *Black White Jewish*, *Stuffed*, *Yell-oh Girls*, *Harmful to Minors*, *Body Outlaws*, and many more) that are relevant to the thousands of men and women taking women's studies courses today.

“I would say any band that's operating today is more important than bands that came before. They're more important *because* they exist,” said Ian MacKaye, the lead singer of Fugazi, in an interview in the Punk Planet anthology, *We Owe You Nothing*. Actually existing feminism is widespread, permeating every corner of the culture and every person in it. More people identify with feminist values than did thirty years ago. Furthermore, young people today (male and female) have grown up in a more feminist environment. People live feminist lives without knowing the label—women run marathons, men can be stay-at-home dads. Given this, those wise words from Karen Durbin can be turned back on the second wave: read our books and participate in our events. Even if you spit out 99 percent of it, reading the books and understanding what younger feminists are doing is a feminist act.

THE MUCH-LAMENTED and longed-for radical movement was both a boon and a curse for writing, by the way. In the seventies, radical feminists regarded writers—even the important ones—as “ripping off the movement,” as Alix Kates Shulman reminded everyone when she received her medal at the VFA event. The ideas were the movement's, any attempt to sign one's own name an act of unforgivable egotism. Writers were the mercenaries in this revolutionary war, fighting by writing, simply in order to make a buck or a male-identified career. A writer has to write, though, and she'll do it even if she's misunderstood or maligned. As the women at VFA kept saying, the feminist writer's job is to tell the

truth. Those women, writing in a different time, were also writing to answer an ignorant question posed by their male colleagues, "Why are there so few great women writers?" Their answer to that bit of received wisdom was a flood of work and a call to sexist, patriarchal society to open its damn eyes.

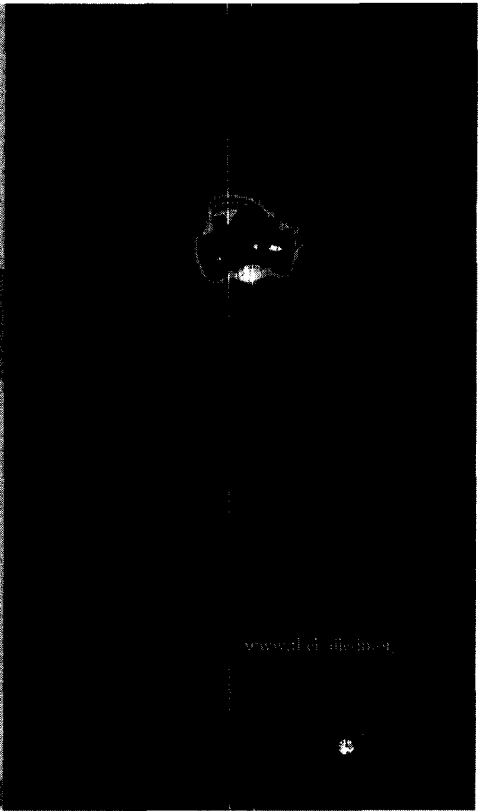
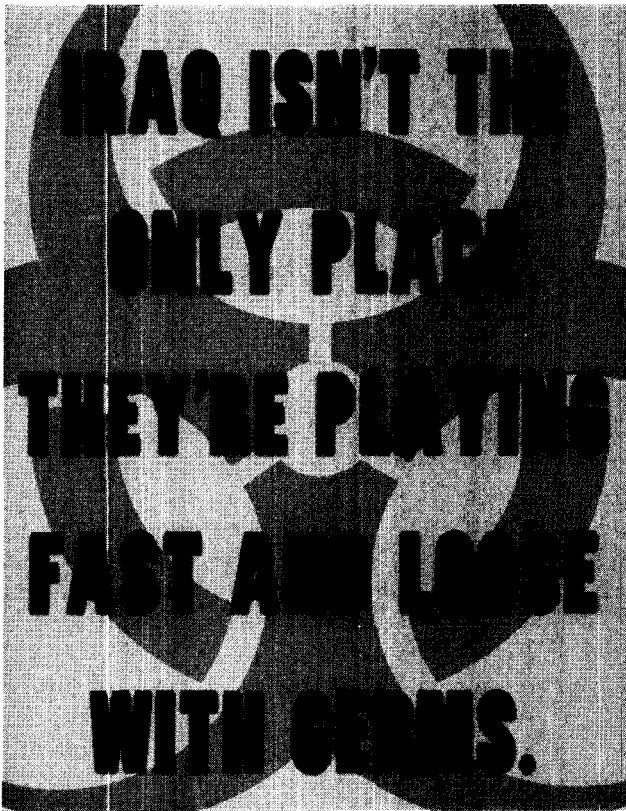
Lesson #5: You can't always get what you want, but sometimes you can.

Coming full circle, the Feminist Classics series actually worked out. We had hesitated about approaching Germaine Greer, certain that she would say no because of a somewhat nasty biography of her published by a subsidiary of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, but she agreed to let us bring out *The Female Eunuch*. It appeared in March 2002. Around the same time, Firestone called to say she had changed her

mind. She wanted *Dialectic of Sex* to be available after all.

In the years since initiating the Feminist Classics series, my opinion about the enterprise has evolved. I still believe the books deserve to be in print—but not because they are more important than the books written by my peers. I believe in the series for the sake of parity. Every movement has its classic texts. We deserve access to ours. ●

JENNIFER BAUMGARDNER, a journalist and the co-author, with Amy Richards, of *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future*, is writing a book about young women and bisexuality (*Look Both Ways*), and she and Richards are at work on a book about activism. She is deciding on the third title in the Feminist Classics series.



Love and Theft

From Jack Robin to Bob Dylan

Marshall Berman

*Mutual forgiveness of each vice,
Such are the gates of paradise.*

—William Blake, “For the Sexes:
The Gates of Paradise”

*My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips’ red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.*

—William Shakespeare, Sonnet 130

I wanna be black. . .

—Lou Reed, “Street Hassle”

*Acting black—a whole social world of irony,
violence, negotiation and learning is contained in
that phrase . . . an unstable or indeed contradic-
tory power, linked to social and political con-
flicts, issues from the weak, the uncanny, the
outside. Above all, the slipperiness. . .*

—Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*

SINCE THE SPREAD of video shops all over America, the Warner Brothers-Al Jolson 1927 film *The Jazz Singer* has been easier than ever to see. It’s too bad that hardly anyone rents it. Not only is it the first-ever “talkie” movie, and probably the first-ever music video, it’s a surprising synthesis of two very different genres: the minstrel show and the bildungsroman. Most literate Americans have an idea of how important the bildungsroman has always been in our national self-scrutiny. Not many people know about the abiding importance of our minstrel tradition, with its high seriousness wrapped in clowning. The book that taught me this is Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Ameri-*

can Working Class. I won’t talk about this rich and fascinating book directly, but it has helped me see where it is I am trying to go.

The most remarkable moment in the 1927 *Jazz Singer* occurs about two-thirds of the way through, when Al Jolson blacks up. “Jack Robin” is the name of the performer who goes to work on himself in this scene; but we the audience remember who and what he was “before.” We met him first as a kid, “Jakie Rabinowitz,” son of a cantor on the Lower East Side. (The movie calls it “The New York Ghetto.”) We saw and heard him sing in clubs and on the street; indeed, his songs were the first sounds in the history of sound film. The screenplay, by Alfred Cohn (edited by Robert Carringer, University of Wisconsin, 1979), says Jakie/Jackie is thirteen, the Bar Mitzvah age when Jewish boys traditionally become men; but the kid we see looks and sounds under ten. Still, this kid (played by Bobby Gordon) can sing, and he can hold the screen. (Think of the clips of Michael Jackson’s Motown screen test.) He sings the late-Victorian love ballad “My Gal Sal,” and the Tin Pan Alley favorite “Waiting for the Robert E. Lee.” His father, the cantor, is tipped off, drags him from the café, proclaims his eternal disgrace (“your lowlife music from the streets”), whips him, and kicks him out. Jakie plunges into the melting pot of vaudeville, anoints himself with a new name, “Jack Robin,” and, like so many great American performers, grows up on the road. For years, he doesn’t look back. But one day he hears a cantor sing, and he is thrown back.

The cantor in the movie is a real person, Yossele Rosenblatt, one of the first Jewish religious figures to record his voice and market it. Jack/Jakie hears him in a theater in Chicago, in a “Special Matinee of Sacred Songs.” The concert’s climax is a Yiddish hit, “*Eili, Eili*”: “My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?” This song is an adaptation of Psalm 22, writ-

ten for Yiddish vaudeville in New York in the 1890s. Not all, but much of the Yiddish audience knew that this was not the only adaptation, nor even the most famous one. The most famous one is the *cri de coeur* of Jesus on the cross (Matt. 27:46). In the movie, the cantor singing "*Eili, Eili*" dissolves into a dream vision of the hero's lost father, so that his family romance is drenched with the pathos of death and martyrdom. (After the Holocaust, "*Eili, Eili*" came to life again as an anthem of a whole people's martyrdom. My grandmother, who had lost most of her family, had Rosenblatt's "*Eili*" and played it obsessively. But no one imagined this in the 1920s.) Jack/Jakie is stunned by all he's lost. He starts to brood, comes to feel something missing in the self he has made.

BY AND BY the hero lands a job in the "April Follies" on Broadway. Now, at last, he has a chance to break through and be recognized as a star in his home town. We the audience have heard his soaring and expansive voice, and we know he's got the stuff, but we fear his morbid undertows. His act evokes many of the sad clowns who haunt Western theatre—Harlequin, Pagliacci, "He Who Gets Slapped," and a whole line of great minstrels (Jolson had played with the Dockstader Minstrels as a kid)—except that, as we see him, he is not at home in his sadness; the planes in his face drift off in different directions, and don't connect. *The Jazz Singer's* narrative, pacing, and tonalities have all been carefully constructed to show us that the hero's story is not mainly about theater, or about success, but about what Keats called "soul-making," and Erik Erikson "ego-identity." Can this man pull his life together? This movie forces us to feel that what's at stake here is *identity*. Like it or not, we all have a stake in that.

Everything is set up to prepare us for the dress rehearsal, the solemn moment when we see the hero actually construct the self he is trying to become. In Jack Robin's dressing room, this self is black. I still recall my outrage, at age nine, when I first saw that paint job, and winced at what I expected to see—*What? Do they expect us to swallow this?*—and my amazement to see that it really worked. Jolson blacks up, and, Behold! For the first time

in the movie, he looks like a serious and integrated person. He faces himself in the mirror to check out the changes. The encounter between him and his mirror image is arranged very carefully. Will he recognize himself? How will he deal with the man he sees? As he gazes, his vision fragments kaleidoscopically into montage (in the 1920s this genre was still fresh), and propels him back in time, into his father's synagogue, into "Jakie Rabinowitz," the kid whose spontaneity and joy he has repressed for twenty years. But at the same time, framing that youthful being, is the face of a thoughtful, soulful, mature man—not a black man, but a man who has made blackness a project. There's something amazing about the black face he has constructed. It's as if this singer has transformed the minstrel "Swanee River" into an inner River Jordan that he needs to cross in order to grow up. Look into those eyes: he looks like a mensch; it looks like he's really on his way.

But why black? What is the power of blackness for Jack? Right after the revelatory moment at the mirror, another clown breaks onstage with another revelation. He is "Yudelson, the Kibitzer from the Ghetto." This shambling, sleazy figure (Otto Lederer) doesn't get much time on the screen, but plays a big role in the story, moving across vital boundaries. At the movie's start, he was the cantor's friend, but also a *flâneur* and a lover of street culture; he heard "Ragtime Jackie" in a grungy club and immediately betrayed him to his father. In the last scene, as Jack/Jakie sings "Mammy" and conquers Broadway, Yudelson will have an amorous arm around Jack's mother. Yudelson is here now to tell the Jazz Singer his father is dying, and to urge him to return to the family, the neighborhood, the synagogue, and God. He can recognize the hero by his voice: "Yes, that's Jakie—with the cry in the voice, just like in the temple." But when he meets him face to face, in blackface, he is disoriented: "Jakie, this ain't you." Then he turns to the audience, to comment on the action he is part of, and abruptly changes his mind. He recognizes that the man next to him is Jackie, after all, but a Jackie who has put himself through big changes: "It talks like Jakie," he says, "but it looks like *his shadow*." [Emphasis added]

IN FACT, the Shadow is a prime image in the history of reflection on the self and the other. It goes a long way back: remember the shadows in Plato's cave, 2,400 years ago? But it isn't explored in the depth it deserves until the creation of modern psychology, whose time horizon is almost exactly that of the movies: Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* was published on New Year's Day 1900. For modern psychologists, the Shadow metaphor is about universal mental processes that they call "projection" and "identification." These processes work within the self in radically different ways. In projection, we ascribe to other people feelings and desires that we cannot accept in ourselves. As we do this, we constrict the scope of our being and enlist in an unending state of war, not only with the people next door, but with ourselves, prime suspects in a hopeless quest for purity. In identification, we yearn for others, want to reach out and touch them, talk to them, be close to them, be like them. Identification helps people grow up, become more than they were, enlarge who they are, and learn to live in peace. But none of us is capable of identifying with other people until we can identify with the dark side of ourselves, until we can bring our shadows into the light and find ways to live with them.

That said, we still don't know what's in those shadows. There must be some emotional strength that the Jazz Singer feels when he wears a black mask, which he feels deprived of when he walks around in just his own Jewish face. Remember the historical context: in 1927, when *The Jazz Singer* was made, American Jews were believed to have "arrived," to be "at home" at last; they were supposed to feel comfortable and grateful. (In those years, Hitler was still a face in the crowd.) Blacks, on the other hand, although freed from slavery, were being lynched and humiliated by laws that could have been made by slaveholders. Some blacks were making a mark in the cities of the North, as in the development of jazz itself. But the great majority were still, like Faulkner's characters, locked into the rural South. Locked out of social striving, they were forced to stay close to home, and, ironically, forced to preserve "the cry in their voice," the sound of primal human emotion. At least that was the aura

through which sympathetic American Jews—and American Christians as well—came to see them.

You could say the kibitzer's "shadow" line gives away *The Jazz Singer's* whole story: a twentieth-century epic where immigrant Jews identify with blacks in ways that help to develop both mass culture and multicultural liberalism. But it isn't quite the whole story. When I looked up this line in Alfred Cohn's shooting script, in the Wisconsin edition, it said something startlingly different from what's on the screen. What Yudelson says in the printed version is, "It talks like Jakie, but it looks like a nigger." [Emphasis added] So the first version was a crude racist insult. Amazing! What happened? I don't know. But somehow, in the process of cultural production, some obscure, unnoticed, maybe even unconscious revolution took place. Did that word call up the horrors of *The Birth of a Nation*? Did the guys behind the scenes recoil and think "Never Again"? Within a couple of minutes, maybe even a couple of seconds, a spit in the black face metamorphosed into something close to an embrace, and the movie grew up.

BLACK WRITERS have generally treated the Jolson *Jazz Singer* amiably: "the black face tradition's crowning achievement and final success," says Donald Bogle, "the minstrel tradition at its sentimentalized, corrupt best."* We can be pretty sure they would not have been so amiable if that "nigger" had made it onto the screen. But that erased, rejected "nigger" is also part of the truth. At least since the end of slavery, and probably before, black people have used the word "nigger" to signify *other* black people whom *they* consider *truly* low, crude, grungy, unidealized—"nothing like the sun." These are the black people that other black people warn their children against. Generations of black children have grown up with commandments from their parents ringing in their ears: "Don't behave like a nigger," "Don't dress like a nigger," "Don't be a nigger." Spike Lee's wonderful *Bamboozled* showed that he is one of those children. But

*Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film (Viking Press, 1973).

even if the United States of the future learns to treat all black people with decency and sensitivity, and even if Americans become as truly united as the people in the beautiful, moving mural that Lee created at the start of *He Got Game*, there will still be no vaccine that can immunize us against “the nigger,” no balm in Gilead to wash the black wire out of our hair.

THE REASONS for this are complex. The fact is, we all live in a culture that is deeply committed, not only to a mental life of binary oppositions, but to the paradoxical idea that “*The last will be first.*” The Christian version of this idea is elaborated in the Gospels. But it goes farther back, at least as far as the book of Exodus, where the very enslavement and oppression of the people of Israel are seen as sources of their power and glory. Ancient Jewish and Christian theology, modern Jewish radicalism, and black militancy come together around the glorification of the wretched of the earth, the lowest of the low. This *noir* romance made Nietzsche tear his white hair. But though he ran from it, he couldn’t hide. (He knew that.) And neither can we. It turns up on the front pages of modern mass culture and the twentieth-century consumer economy, with their “lowest common denominator” and reign of the House of Nielsen. It adorns the golden door of American democracy, praising the Statue of Liberty as a goddess of immigration who opens herself to “the wretched refuse of [foreign] teeming shores.” Alas, celebrations of the lowest and the last all present a chronic toxic hazard, an endless potential for slippage. *How low can you go?* For five decades, rock and roll has sweated blood to flesh out the bottom and make it dance. Johnny Rotten’s “We are the future/ there is no future” may be its strongest affirmation. But our species deep down may be something rock can’t crack: like Bottom’s midsummer’s night dream, “It hath no bottom.”

Let’s come back to Jack Robin’s dressing room. There are many ways a black face can help a Jew. Michael Alexander, at the very start of his recent study *Jazz Age Jews*, puts it well. Even as Jolson’s generation moved up from the ghetto into the American middle class,

some of its members displayed a peculiar be-

havior that did not correspond to their new social positions. They acted as though they were increasingly marginalized. What is more, many identified with less fortunate individuals and groups . . . by imitating, defending, and actually participating in the group life of marginalized Americans. . . . Outsider *identification* . . . is a paradox in the psychology of American Jewry. As Jews moved up, they identified down. [Emphasis added]

From the standpoint of consciousness expansion, personal growth, *Bildung*, the leap into blackness could open up fruitful cultural paths. For Jewish kids who did not want to become comfortable “allrightniks,” blackface enabled them to feel firmly, even righteously American without having to feel white. Over the generations, it could help them become Jerome Kern, the Gershwin brothers (“The real American folk song is—A RAG!”), the Marx brothers, Dorothy Parker, A. J. Liebling, Mezz Mezzrow, Barney Josephson, Max Gordon, Jerry Wexler, Lenny Bruce, Leonard Bernstein, Seymour Krim, Nat Hentoff, Norman Mailer, Larry Rivers, Allen Ginsberg, Phil Spector, Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, Laura Nyro, Dr. John, Doc Pomus, Richard Price—and so many more whom I forget, or never knew. (*Forgive!*) For decades, people like these have helped to excavate the vast wealth of black culture and to open it up to millions of whites who knew it not. And they have confronted America with a *j’accuse*: its betrayal of its black people is proof of its betrayal of itself. All this is fine. But still, any Jew who is hip enough to want to be black—or even to be painted black—is smart enough to know that there is something unkosher about the deal. We know how much we’ve got from them. But what have they got from us? I thought I knew when I read Ralph Ellison or Franklin Frazier; but *Nu*, so what have we done for them lately? (Is there any hour late enough, any night dark enough, that the guys on the Harvard-Princeton Dream Team could talk? Maybe at Katz’s Deli on Houston Street, the most fully integrated place in New York, open twenty-four hours a day.)

In fact, this guilty unease defines *The Jazz Singer*’s climax. When Yudelson asks Jack/Jakie to return and to use his voice to help his father die, the music he wants the Jazz Singer to

perform is called Kol Nidre. For many Jews, this chanting is the most dramatic and spiritually intense moment of the year. It happens on the night that begins Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. (It often coincides with the World Series; Hank Greenberg and later Sandy Koufax were Jewish stars who refused to play.) Many secular Jews who wouldn't dream of going to synagogue all year still feel they have to be there for this. Kol Nidre is special in that it is a prayer addressed not to God, but to other men and women. It is a prayer for self-knowledge. We are supposed to recognize all the ways we have hurt each other all year, not just in our overt behavior, but in our shadows, in fantasy, or desire. Its implicit leap of faith is that, if we can face each other in full knowledge of the bad things we have done, or even the bad things we have dreamed of doing, then we will have the right to ask for mutual forgiveness. And, in Blake's words, "Mutual forgiveness of each vice / Such are the gates of paradise."

More than any other Jewish ritual, Kol Nidre is driven by music. The cantor's solo is the most passionate, heartrending music of the liturgical year. Nothing else can break through peoples' resistance and open up their emotional floodgates. Any Jew who goes through this ritual remembers all the synagogue members who wonder what's the point of paying for a cantor, but then, after the great solo, leave the synagogue in tears and pray to be forgiven for their forgetting. At *The Jazz Singer's* climax, Jolson sings the Kol Nidre prayer with an emotional force and intensity that have eluded him until now. The act of returning to his father and his mother and "the ghetto," of connecting his adulthood with his childhood, has freed unconscious energy and tapped emotional depths. Now he can sing "from the heart" for the first time in his life.

Whose forgiveness is the Jazz Singer praying for? Maybe his parents', whose world he could never belong to; maybe his friends in show business, who believed in him and helped him reach the center stage that he is now (so he believes) throwing away. It's hard to know who's on anybody's list; and in fact the Kol Nidre ritual is conceived collectively, so that everybody covers for everybody else. But we can be pretty sure that Jackie's list, and Jolson's,

includes the black people who taught him so much, whose faces, lips, eyes, rhythms, melodies, and whose hopes he seized, and grasped, and made his own, and crooned, and scatted, and shouted to the world. This doesn't mean he would have put up with charges like those of my late dear friend Mike Rogin (in his book *Black Masks, White Noise*) that not only *The Jazz Singer*, but just about all pop culture created by twentieth-century Jews is part of a gigantic Jewish Primal Crime Against The Blacks. But it's surely true that the emotional stew of *The Jazz Singer* includes some sort of sense of guilt toward blacks. He wants to be forgiven on the ground that his grand theft sprang from love.

THIS JOLSON movie was actually *The Jazz Singer's* third incarnation. The first was a story by Samson Raphaelson, published in *Everybody's Magazine* in 1922 under the title "The Day of Atonement." The second, called *The Jazz Singer*, was a stage adaptation, also by Raphaelson. It starred George Jessel and played on Broadway from 1925 to 1927; it closed just a couple of months before the movie opened. The story's incarnations diverge in various ways, but they all vindicate the myth that "the last will be first": the act of rejecting Broadway's artificiality in favor of values that are supposedly more "authentic" makes the hero authentically qualified for Broadway success.

In the story "The Day of Atonement," the cynical Broadway producer follows the hero down to the Lower East Side. Jackie's solo converts him, and he rushes to the corner drugstore to call his partner uptown:

"Harry," said Lee, "do you want to hear the greatest ragtime singer in America in the making? A wonder, Harry, a wonder! . . . Come down right away. It's a dirty little hole on the East Side called the Hester Street Synagogue. I'll meet you on the corner of Hester and Norfolk."

In the movie, the shooting script ends with the hero's *goyishe* girlfriend's rather klunky lament, "You are listening to the stage's greatest blackface comedian singing to his God." The screen fades to black. But then, an instant later,

a title tells us: "The season passes—and time heals—the show goes on." The soundtrack turns upbeat and jazzy, and the screen quick-cuts to a spectacular panorama of Times Square's blinding lights. Cut to a Broadway theater, where the blackfaced hero sings "Mammy" in a style at once cantorial and operatic, at an energy level that is overpowering. His mother is in the audience, arm in arm with Yudelson, and an ecstatic smile passes between mother and son. Not only the hero's dead father with his commandments and his commands but the whole tragic dilemma that the movie blocked out so well seem to belong not just to another age but to another planet. Dr. Pangloss is handling the dramaturgy on this planet. Before we have a chance to say, "Hold it!" the movie is over.

The Jazz Singer takes us for a ride, but a ride that most of us would be glad to take. It plunges us into the "magic realism" that is at the heart of modern mass culture. In this new world, tragedy can metamorphose instantly into comedy, and the project of giving up everything can turn out to be just a chapter in the dialectics of having it all. It's easy to dismiss the Panglossian myth. And yet, and yet. Let's be honest: Is there anybody in the house who really doesn't want to have it all? (Isn't liberalism a belief that we can have it all? Isn't Marxism a belief that we need to overthrow capitalism, and *then* we can have it all?) If mass culture can make us happy, should we deny ourselves this happiness? When I was twenty, I thought that mass culture's only justification for existing was its capacity to put us all up against the wall. Now I'm sixty, I've mellowed out, and I want all the happiness I can get. Still, I don't think it will make me happy to confuse magic realism with reality.

I'VE BEEN focusing on Jewish identity up to now. But *The Jazz Singer* tells all Americans something crucial about *their* identity. One of the movie's primary achievements, as Jim Hoberman pointed out in *Vulgar Modernism*, is to establish Jolson, the world's first cinematic voice, as "the first modern American superstar." American popular comedy, from the earliest carnivals and minstrel shows through the heyday of vaudeville and burlesque, has always

heaped scorn and ridicule on the solemn official cult of white Anglo-Saxon purity. That cult took on an ominous new life in the 1920s, the decade when America closed the gates. Congress passed several laws to create a system of quotas that effectively ended immigration for the next forty years. Those quotas were based on a dream of a lost white and Anglo-Saxon purity, polluted and corrupted by a great stream of dark and dirty "others." D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) showed how new media and America's developing mass culture could be mobilized in the service of this fantasy. On the other (left) hand, Charlie Chaplin's tramp gave a spectacular new visual life to the democratic dream of "the last will be first." Chaplin celebrated the comedy whose creative center is typically an urban immigrant slum, "a dirty little hole in the East Side," a neighborhood teeming with filthy streets and cellars and crowds of dark, dirty, raggedy, sleazy, undernourished, lecherous FOBs (Fresh Off the Boat). Places such as these were the birthplace of movies and jazz and modern mass culture and everything that makes America a genuinely "new world."

Randolph Bourne, a young disciple of John Dewey, wrote an essay, "Trans-National America" (1916), that may be the first theory of this world. Bourne argued that immigrants to America don't "assimilate" into a pre-existing Anglo world: they mix their old cultures with new conditions to create a blended, hybrid American culture that never existed anywhere until now. "Only the American," he said, "has a chance to become a citizen of the world." This meant "not a nationality, but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors."

It took awhile for Americans to get this. The "trans-national" vision animates many all-inclusive Popular Front murals, anti-Nazi World War II films, the canonical Frank Sinatra-Albert Maltz short film *The House I Live In*, which won a special Oscar in 1945. It was affirmed officially a generation later, when Lyndon Johnson's 1965 Immigration Act opened the gates once more. It is the real meaning that underlies the contemporary word "multicultural," a word used in many confused and phony ways. You can see it any day in New York on

the number seven subway line or hear it on music radio. People who have grown up with it often take it for granted; but people who have emigrated from nearly anywhere can feel the difference. When Jolson paints himself black, he performs multicultural America's first sacrament: he constitutes himself as both the mixer and the mix.

P.S.: Almost forty years ago, I brought my first Bob Dylan album home to the Bronx. Our only record player was in my mother's room, and I couldn't listen to it without playing it for her. She enjoyed it, more than I thought she would—maybe she picked up “the cry in his voice”—but she said she had a problem with his name. “Hm, Bob Dylan, I wonder what it was before.” *What was it before?* Given, taken, and changed names were a crucial issue for my parents' generation: it was central to their way of assessing authenticity. I got so mad! But of course she was right. If we look back with a long view, the name “Bob Dylan” sounds roughly as real—or real in the same way—as “Jack Robin.” I'm not saying

that any of Dylan's names is *unreal*. I'm just saying that the whole issue of authenticity is a lot more slippery than either of us—than any of us—imagined when we were young. Maybe someday some graduate student somewhere will explore the theme through Dylan's forty-year *oeuvre*. (Maybe that could justify the existence of Cultural Studies.) I bring it up now only because the title of his latest album, “Love and Theft,” and the refrain of its best song—“Only one thing I did wrong / Stayed in Mississippi a day too long”—suggest it's on his mind. Not that I would ever try to race or chase or track or trace Bob Dylan's mind. But the orbit it's rolling in today looks a lot like the one that Al Jolson defined, more than seventy years ago, when he invited us into his dressing room to watch him paint himself black. ●

MARSHALL BERMAN, author of *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* and *Adventures in Marxism*, teaches at CCNY/CUNY. He is working on *100 Years of Spectacle: The Metamorphoses of Times Square*.

Announcing Boston Review's Tenth Annual

SHORT STORY CONTEST

Deadline: September 1, 2002

First Prize: \$1,000

Guidelines: The winner will receive \$1,000 and have his or her work published in the December/January 2002-2003 issue of *Boston Review*. Stories should not exceed four thousand words and must be previously unpublished. The author's name, address, and phone number should be on the first page of each entry; do not send a cover letter. Manuscripts will not be returned. A \$15 entry fee, payable to *Boston Review* in the form of a check or money order, must accompany all submissions. **Submissions must be postmarked no later than September 1, 2002.** Entrants will receive a one-year subscription to *Boston Review*, beginning with the December/January 2002-2003 issue. Send entries to: Short Story Contest, *Boston Review*, E53-407 MIT, Cambridge, MA 02139.

Soundings

A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND CULTURE

Editors: Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, Michael Rustin

Soundings makes a substantial contribution to critical debate in Britain, surveying the current political and cultural scene, and exploring the possibilities for convincing new radical visions. Focusing on key issues that are shaping society, it pays particular attention to the continuing developments of New Labour and the Third Way.

Each issue is a paperback book, half of which is devoted to a major contemporary theme. Recent contributors have included Cynthia Cockburn, Nira Yuval Davis, Jackie Kaye, Stuart Hall, Bruno Latour, Gail Lewis, Doreen Massey, Chantal Mouffe, Mike Phillips, Jonathan Rutherford, Michael Rustin, Lola Young.

'Soundings combines engagement and consciousness with a certain playfulness'

The Independent

'A well written and welcome new journal'

John Gray, THES



ISSN: 1362 6620 192pp Published three times a year March, July & November

Current overseas subscription rates

	Individual	Institutional
Print only	£45.00	£120.00
Print and online	£59.99 plus post and packing (£2.00 UK/Europe)	£139.99 plus post and packing (£2.00 UK/Europe)

Payments can be made by Visa or MasterCard - your card details must be provided. Your credit card company will pay us in sterling.

Published by Lawrence & Wishart, 99A Wallis Road, London, E9 5LN. E-mail: soundings@l-w-bks.demon.co.uk

For more information on past and forthcoming issues, and for a taster of editorial commentary, why not visit the L&W website at www.l-w-bks.co.uk

Union Strategies

Nelson Lichtenstein

IN HER REVIEW of my *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* ("A Dearth of Inspiration," Spring 2002), Daphne Eviatar offers a tough-minded critique of a book she labels "utopian" and out of touch with "political reality." She argues that unions are pretty much stuck with a labor law, an existing system of collective bargaining, and a political process that is far from ideal, but labor partisans can't simply junk that whole system. They must defend and deploy what is most useful, even in the mundane world of contract renegotiations and grievance arbitration. Radical intellectuals and academics who project a wholesale transformation of American labor relations are either impractical or irresponsible, the latter evident in the Naderite sabotage of a Gore victory in the 2000 election.

Eviatar caricatures key elements of the book, so in this rejoinder I'll restate the argument and then deal with the real differences between us.

In *State of the Union* I remind twenty-first-century readers that collective bargaining and contract unionism have always been but one path toward a solution to the century-old "labor question." From the Progressive Era through the New Deal and into the 1960s and beyond, the labor movement—in its better moments—has sought to link firm-centered bargaining to a larger and more inclusive political project. In the Progressive Era the push for a set of state-mandated labor standards was particularly useful to working-class women; in the 1930s and 1940s, strikes, electoral mobilizations, and White House-mediated negotiations with pattern-setting firms generated an expansive system I call "politicized bargaining." In the 1960s and afterward public employee unionism could never have flourished without

a new understanding of workplace rights that arose out of the black liberation struggle.

Employers and conservatives hated such linkages. They wanted to isolate unions by coercing them into a collective bargaining regime that was "free" of any social or political resonance. This was the function of the Taft-Hartley Act. Eviatar mistakenly asserts that I held the purge of the communists the most important consequence of that 1947 law. Taft-Hartley's anticommunist provisions did fragment the left and chill internal union debate, but I take pains to argue that most employers considered the elimination of union radicals a secondary issue. Far more important was the proscription of supervisory unionism, the curbs on inter-union solidarity and political action, and the expansion of the right of managers to intimidate their employees in union organizing drives.

This was a defeat, and Eviatar seems to accept much of my analysis: union parochialism represented a repudiation of the larger, society-shaping ambitions of the pre-World War II unions; moreover, even for those white male workers who benefited from this system of "free" collective bargaining, danger loomed. Because capitalism is an inherently unstable and ever-changing system, firm-centered bargaining regimes undergo periodic economic and organizational crises, as we have seen during the last thirty years. America never really had a "labor-capital" accord, which is why industrial conflict was intense and continuous, as Jack Metzgar documented in his splendid memoir of that era, *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered*.

But Eviatar takes exception to much of what follows. She particularly dismisses my critique of those liberal academics and radical intellectuals who took this union defeat and turned it either into a celebration of mid-century American pluralism or a rationale for aban-

donment of the whole labor metaphysic. "What evidence do we have that wage laborers or union leaders of the time were paying such intellectuals any mind?"

True, they weren't reading Seymour Martin Lipset or Dwight Macdonald, but one thing those on the left have learned from the conservative ascendancy of the last twenty-five years is that hegemony is hard work. A transformation in law, political culture, and social commitment requires an ideological advance guard that can give meaning, animation, and purpose to votes, strikes, and grassroots mobilizations. A central purpose of my book was to demonstrate how and why the union idea needs a genuinely radical defense that links it to an expansive understanding of citizenship, egalitarianism, and democracy. This was as true in the 1950s, when the unions stood at their numerical apogee, as it is today when the only people left to defend them—or offer a semblance of constructive criticism—are those who see a reconstructed labor movement as the kernel of a new society.

THIS BRINGS US to Eviatar's unhappy view that any fundamental reform of the industrial relations system is wishful thinking. "A reform strategy needs to reckon with political reality," she writes, arguing that my formulation that labor should function as "an independent, and sometimes, as a disloyal, component of the Democratic coalition" is a prescription for Republican rule. Actually, it recognizes that the system is rigged against a third party, which is why it is so important that labor carve out a distinctive profile in the political culture.

But whatever the exact political strategy, Eviatar devalues left-wing values and visions, subordinating them to the mundane but necessary work of the existing unions, who offer tangible benefits for hard-pressed workers. C. Wright Mills had a phrase for such dichotomous thinking: "crackpot realism." Fortunately, thousands of young people have joined the union movement in the last few years, in part because a number of high-profile unionists have given the left some institutional breathing room. This does not mean that the day-to-day work of the unions, including collective

bargaining, should be cast aside. But such routine functioning will itself collapse unless infused with a far larger purpose.

Indeed, a central theme in the book demonstrates the extent to which the demise of the union idea in the 1950s and 1960s created an ideological and institutional vacuum in which a rights-consciousness legal regime substituted itself for the "industrial jurisprudence" that had once seemed such a promising road to workplace justice. When it came to safeguarding a worker's dignity and income, a new generation of liberals and radicals thought Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act far more inclusive and potent than the desiccated provisions of the Wagner Act. Taking their cues from the resurgent civil rights movement, such judicial liberals as Hugo Black and William O. Douglas devalued solidarity and collective action, opening the door to the anti-union zealots of the National Right To Work Committee and like-minded libertarians.

Eviatar seems to think that I am a proponent of this shift. However, the book is critical of this turn, not out of some neoconservative hostility to affirmative action or "rights talk," but because this model of workplace justice, which is so dependent upon legal authority and government policy, will prove divisive or ineffectual unless animated and institutionalized by employees acting in some kind of collective, democratic fashion.

But partisans of a union revival would be equally foolish to ignore the overwhelming legitimacy of contemporary America's rights-conscious political culture. This became clear to me during the decade I taught at the University of Virginia. In Charlottesville there is no labor law for public employees; more important, there is no union tradition, no occasion for singing "Solidarity Forever" or the Joe Hill ballads. I was insufficiently aware of this in the early 1990s when we invited the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees to campus. The union inaugurated a straightforward organizing campaign that promptly failed.

So the next time, we linked our organizing effort to the ideas and legacies that had emerged out of the civil rights movement. We made "Workers' Rights are Civil Rights" the

theme of a big labor teach-in that put Julian Bond and Richard Trumka on the same podium. Eviatar is contemptuous of such campus-based events and of the intellectuals who often organize them, but in Charlottesville we developed a textbook example of how a rights-conscious culture and the union impulse may be fruitfully intertwined. At the teach-in and in a campaign that lasted five years, the word "union" was hardly mentioned. But gradually we legitimized the idea of an independent employee voice, and we generated a symbiotic organizing culture that linked employee wage and welfare issues firmly to the racial and gender concerns that university administrators themselves often recognized as legitimate.

The Charlottesville experience may not be a model for the nation, but because Eviatar

thinks such consciousness raising ineffectual, I'm happy to record our accomplishments. Two years ago a living-wage campaign paid off with a modest wage increase for the lowest-paid, largely African-American employees. And this year, a spirited group of clerical workers, followed shortly thereafter by an equally determined teaching assistant cohort, affiliated themselves with the Communications Workers of America. They now sign their letters and e-mails "In Solidarity," which itself represents something of a cultural revolution in that college town. Neither group will soon win a collective bargaining contract in anti-union Virginia, but something even more important has been set afoot. ●

NELSON LICHTENSTEIN teaches history at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Daphne Eviatar Responds

IF NELSON LICHTENSTEIN is only arguing that the contemporary labor movement should be bolstered by ideas, then we don't disagree. As I noted in my review, inspiration is important. But to sustain the union spirit, workers need to see concrete results. That's where the law comes in, and where Lichtenstein's analysis and prescriptions get muddled.

In his emphasis on sweeping labor ideology, Lichtenstein is dismissive of the bulk of the actual work unions do, particularly the collective bargaining process, by which unions can boost their members' wages and benefits and in many situations save their jobs. Although he never directly argues for repeal of the National Labor Relations Act, the source of unions' rights to organize and bargain collectively, he claims that the scheme it created is outdated and counterproductive. By couching workers' rights in legal terms and creating elaborate procedures to enforce them, he writes, it has sapped the labor movement and left workers dependent on union bureaucracies to fight the good fight for them. Implicit in this view is distaste for the notion that "legal authority and government policy" can be effective tools for change. But the striking success of the "rights-

conscious legal regime" Lichtenstein writes about in his book proves just the opposite.

The civil rights movement, animated not by the left-wing intellectuals Lichtenstein credits but by grassroots activists and religious leaders, got a huge boost from the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That law created, among other things, enforceable employment rights that have improved opportunities, wages, and working conditions for a broad range of workers while radically altering American political attitudes toward discrimination on the job. As Lichtenstein acknowledges in his book, even employers, wary of costly lawsuits, have embraced the law's principles.

Unfortunately, one can't say the same for workers' right to organize. That's not because of a failure on the part of intellectuals, however, as Lichtenstein insists. Rather, it's due largely to a toothless legal regime that provides little support for organizing or bargaining, and accordingly has given unions little to show for their efforts.

Lichtenstein sees ideological support for labor as a prerequisite to more tangible gains. But the two go hand-in-hand. Contrary to Lichtenstein's claim, I never wrote that he believed "the most important consequence" of the

1947 Taft-Hartley Act was the purge of the communists; but I did note that he emphasizes the law's symbolic rather than practical consequences. He reinforces that view here, writing that the function of Taft-Hartley was to coerce unions into a regime that was "free" of any social and political resonance." While the tone the law set may have been significant, its most devastating aspect for unions was that it tied their hands in organizing and protesting. That made it far more difficult to recruit new members, win better contracts, and expand union ranks.

My emphasis on the concrete, rather than symbolic, consequences of the law does not devalue "left-wing values and visions," as Lichtenstein claims. I just think they ought to be used to accomplish something tangible as well as ideological. To Lichtenstein, that's just more evidence of my "crackpot realism." But Lenin had a phrase for Lichtenstein's style of uncompromising utopianism: "infantile leftism." The refusal to see political conditions as they are and direct one's efforts toward improv-

ing them is ultimately a counterproductive indulgence.

I'm not "contemptuous" of events such as teach-ins aimed at consciousness raising; but when such lessons are confined to the college campus, their impact is limited. Lichtenstein didn't mention the results of the living wage campaign at the University of Virginia in his book, but I'm pleased to learn, as he now reports, that over the course of several years some employees won a modest wage increase, and clerical workers and teaching assistants have affiliated with the Communications Workers of America. These are positive steps. But to create the sort of radical change Lichtenstein envisions, labor must be able to offer more. Hopeful workers may at first be content to sign their e-mails "In Solidarity," but if the only benefits they gain are a warm fuzzy feeling, their enthusiasm will surely wane.

DAPHNE EVIATAR is a New York-based writer and former labor lawyer.

The "legendary" (The Wall Street Journal Europe) German-Jewish paper founded in 1934, relaunched as the Transatlantic Jewish Paper in 2002.

Aufbau

Bill
Controversy
Insider

German

I order an AUFBAU-Subscription:

☐ **Summer Special** (13 issues) *

• 25 U.S. Dollar (U.S. + Canada)

* offer valid until August 15, 2002

☐ **One-Year Subscription** (25 issues)

• 60 U.S. Dollar (U.S. + Canada)

Name

Address

City

State

Zip Code

Country

Please send form to:

AUFBAU

Attn. Subscription

2121 Broadway

New York, NY 10023

Fax (212) 496-5736

Phone: (212) 873-7400

www.aufbauonline.com

abo@aufbauonline.com

TRANSITION

Edited by
Henry Louis
Gates, Jr.
and Kwame
Anthony
Appiah



The world's nosiest magazine.

From Aryans in India to witches in Soweto, from necrophiliacs in Argentina to dandies in the Congo, *Transition* chases unusual stories across the globe. Essayists, philosophers, rappers, and novelists say things in our pages they would never say anywhere else.

Foreign Policy says we're "important," the *Times Literary Supplement* thinks we're "urgent," the *New York Times* finds us "cheeky."

Haven't you been minding your own business long enough?
Read *Transition* and see what we'll sniff out next.

www.TransitionMagazine.com

Published by Duke University Press
Call toll-free 1-888-387-5765 (U.S. and Canada) or 1-773-645-0982 (overseas).

Winner of the 1999 Alternative Press Award for International Reporting



Michael Harrington on Thompson Street in New York City, January 29, 1964. Copyright © by Fred W. McDarrah.

Re-reading Michael Harrington's *The Other America*

David Glenn

WHEN MICHAEL HARRINGTON'S *The Other America* was published in 1962, Larry Moore was in elementary school on the north side of Milwaukee. His parents had moved from the rural south a few years earlier to find work in an African-American neighborhood in the industrial Midwest—the kind of densely populated slum where, Harrington feared, “the poor [were] increasingly slipping out of the very experience and consciousness of the nation.”

Today Moore is executive director of the Metcalfe Park Residents Association—Metcalfe Park is one of Milwaukee's poorest neighborhoods. He's a compact, muscular man with the sort of efficient, world-weary air carried by high school principals of a certain age. From a small office on top of a North Avenue storefront, Moore helps connect neighborhood residents with social services or sympathetic lawyers, and he oversees development projects funded through Community Development Block Grants.

By some important measures, Metcalfe Park's citizens are in less desperate shape than they were a decade ago. But it is still true that in the year 2000, after seven years of economic boom and five years of aggressive welfare reform, a third of the neighborhood's tax filers with dependents—people getting out of bed and going to work to provide for their children—were living below the official poverty line, even after factoring in their earned income tax credits (EITC). Bear in mind that the official poverty line is \$11,940 for a household of two and \$18,100 for a household of four. A saner definition of poverty would include a much larger fraction of Metcalfe Park residents.

You might imagine—and some people *did*

imagine, back when Wisconsin's welfare reform was enacted in the mid-1990s—that the scarcity of decent jobs would by now have people at the barricades. There are precedents: Milwaukee's early socialist movement fought for the eight-hour work day (at the cost of seven workers fatally shot by the state militia in 1886) and campaigned for public works jobs long before the New Deal. And in the late 1960s and early 1970s, civil rights organizations picketed the city's informally segregated factories, challenging racist employers and unions to behave decently. For a few years, the local labor movement as a whole was on fire: teamsters and dockworkers launched wildcat strikes in 1972.

So far, no such militancy has re-emerged in the era of welfare reform. Metcalfe Park's civic leaders are devoting most of their energy this year not to fighting for jobs but to coping with street crime. Although violent crime has declined in the neighborhood by 40 percent since 1993, it's still felt on a visceral level as a crisis, something that wrecks everyday life even more seriously than unemployment. In the summer of 2001, a Metcalfe Park youth gang called the Murda Mobb committed a highly publicized series of killings; one of their victims was the son of a well-known local minister.

Last January, I visited Larry Moore's office to talk about all of this: jobs, youth crime, high school dropouts, everything that has gone wrong. At one point I asked, “If there were suddenly enough decent jobs for everyone in the city, to what extent do you think these crime and dropout problems would go away? I know it's not that simple, but. . .”

Here Moore gave a bitter smile. “No, it's not that simple. But let me tell you something: It *would have been* that simple if they'd created jobs for everyone back in the late sixties. Now we've got to deal with these monsters that have been created through another thirty years

of the cycle of poverty.”

Moore’s comment probably isn’t quite right. (Are teenage gang members fundamentally monstrous today in a way they weren’t in 1968?) But as one reads *The Other America* in 2002, it’s impossible not to share Moore’s sense of rage and anguish at opportunities lost. If only the American left had been a little tougher, a little smarter during the last forty years, what might Metcalfe Park look like today? Suppose the poor people’s movements that fought for welfare expansion in the 1960s had not demobilized in the following decades—that they’d continued to fight for job training, child care, health care. Suppose the labor movement had seized the industrial recession of the 1980s as an occasion to fight for federal job creation to repair our economy’s chronically deficient job demand. The social democratic activists who governed Milwaukee in the early twentieth century would surely scorn our failures of imagination, will, and backbone.

Harrington’s text seems to predict our condition—not through explicit scare stories about what would happen if poverty were left to fester, but through an undercurrent of melancholy:

In the late fifties I talked to some hospital workers in Chicago. They were walking a picket line, seeking union recognition. (They lost.)

It is difficult to find any basis for optimism in this area.

You will find faces that are often happy but always, even at the moment of bursting joy, haunted.

The Other America is usually remembered as a document of muscular, confident early-1960s liberalism. And it is that. One of Harrington’s great gifts was his ability to make reform seem plausible and moral outrage obvious and necessary. When he writes of the “16,000,000 Americans denied coverage by the Minimum-Wage Act of 1961,” his quiet anger gets the blood pumping, even today. (The effect is aided by the book’s archaic habit of rendering large round numbers as numerals: all those zeroes staring us in the face.)

But *The Other America* is also a gloomy

book—gloomier, in an odd way, than Harrington’s later, more explicitly socialist books, which enjoyed much less popular success. When Harrington writes,

So the new form of the old slums will continue; the inadequacies and tragedies of our past public housing policy will remain with us; and that tenacious organism, the culture of poverty, will settle down comfortably in our urban rot . . .

he isn’t using a sky-is-falling rhetorical device, he’s making an honest prediction. (And a more or less accurate one.) The book ends with a list of the political forces arrayed against the poor: free-market ideologues, segregationists, employers protecting their access to cheap labor. There is no comparable set of forces on the left, Harrington writes. Labor unions and “middle-class liberals” won’t do the trick, especially as long as they are “caught in the irrationalities of the American party system,” with the Democratic Party held hostage by Southern racists.

THAT LAST prediction was quickly challenged by events. Within two years of the book’s publication, the Johnson administration had declared “war on poverty,” and Harrington himself spent twelve days in Washington as an informal adviser to a best-and-brightest task force headed by Sargent Shriver. In his excellent *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington*, Maurice Isserman relates that Harrington and his Socialist Party colleague Paul Jacobs designated themselves the task force’s “gadfly division,” puckishly concluding their memos with the declaration, “Of course, there is no real solution to the problem of poverty until we abolish the capitalist system.”

Harrington and Jacobs urged the Johnson administration to anchor its antipoverty efforts in the New Deal model of public works projects and government-created jobs. That strategy was endorsed by Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz—but Johnson rejected it as far too expensive. In the end, the federal war on poverty’s major fruits were the imperfectly designed Medicaid and Head Start programs, along with a hodgepodge of neighborhood development projects funded via the Office of

Equal Opportunity. Meanwhile, at the state level, poor people's organizations that had mobilized in the context of civil rights struggles successfully pressured governments to relax their eligibility standards for Aid to Families with Dependent Children. This dramatic late-1960s expansion of welfare protected millions of people from abject poverty and played a role in strengthening women's bargaining power within families. But welfare expansion also had a number of perverse effects (and not just the ones conservatives like to talk about). Because AFDC and its ancillary programs were so deeply unpopular, the U.S. left expended immense energy from roughly 1970 until the "reforms" of 1996 in defensive battles to protect benefit levels and access to entitlements—which it mostly lost. And almost entirely lost in this fracas was the old notion, both more radical and more popular, of reforming labor markets to ensure that all of us have access to jobs with decent wages and benefits.

Harrington himself, of course, spent many years trying to keep that idea alive. In the afterword to a 1970 edition of *The Other America*, he argued that the Nixon administration's proposals for a guaranteed income would not succeed without a concomitant plan for job creation.

Such a program should have, of course, a work incentive. Instead of the typical American practice of taxing the earnings of the welfare recipient 100 percent (by reducing his benefits by the amount of his wages), the individual should be allowed to keep a decreasing portion of his income supplement as his pay goes up. But this also means that there must be a vast increase in the number of decent jobs. In New York City, where Aid for Dependent Children payments are around the level of menial jobs in the economy, there is no motive for mothers to look for work and they haven't. So a guaranteed income with a work incentive means a commitment to genuine full employment.

This point turned out to be moot, since Nixon's guaranteed-income proposal never came to fruition. All of a sudden it was 1973: oil crisis, recession, and the beginning of business's counteroffensive against labor and the left. And this brings us back to Harrington's

original pessimism about forming a political coalition against poverty. Labor unions and middle-class liberals have not, in fact, done the trick. Fractured along lines of race, region, gender and class, and too often poisoned by anti-democratic venoms, the U.S. left since 1970 has been much less than the sum of its parts, rarely concentrating its forces behind viable and sustainable proposals to increase popular power.

In his famous 1963 *New Yorker* essay about *The Other America*, Dwight Macdonald argued that social scientific reports and journalistic exposés, even those from people as skilled as Harrington, are no substitute for actual political organization and power.

It's not that Public Opinion doesn't become Aroused every now and then. But the arousal never leads to much. It was aroused twenty-four years ago when John Steinbeck published *The Grapes of Wrath*, but Mr. Harrington reports that things in the Imperial Valley are still much the same: low wages, bad housing, no effective union. Public Opinion is too public—that is, too general; of its very nature, it can have no sustained interest in California agriculture. The only groups with such a continuing interest are the workers and the farmers who hire them. Once Public Opinion ceased to be Aroused, the battle was again between the two antagonists with a real, personal stake in the outcome, and there was no question about which was stronger.

It is here that things seem most grim. It is difficult to imagine how and when the left will regain the organizational strength to fight successfully in the hand-to-hand combat Macdonald describes. Unions have improved their capacities during the last several years, but this may have been too little, too late. And the civil rights and feminist organizations of the 1960s have almost entirely demobilized; they have lobbyists, lawyers, and media consultants, but almost no grassroots presence.

But there is also some reason for hope. In certain states, the post-1996 welfare reforms have produced a (very) faint echo of the kind of guaranteed income/full employment structure that Harrington urged back in 1970. There is now a broad consensus that everyone ought to be working, and that state governments

should provide low-income workers with health care, child care, and tax subsidies that will “make work pay.” The new arrangements are loaded with hypocrisy and injustice: states generally aren’t going out of their way to ensure that everyone entitled to these work supports is actually receiving them. And the states’ efforts to create “jobs” for welfare recipients often involve absurd minimum-wage make-work and/or de facto subsidies for corporations like Sodexo Marriott. But the new consensus does create rhetorical space for an organized, disciplined left.

Imagine what the people of Metcalfe Park, Milwaukee, might fight for. (The data that follow are from a study of zip code 53210 conducted by Lois Quinn and John Pawasarat of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s Employment and Training Institute.) The neighborhood’s average household income rose steadily during the 1990s, suggesting that some of our worst fears about welfare reform were unfounded. Employment, however, has not increased nearly as sharply as welfare receipt has dropped. From 1994 to 2000, the number of welfare recipients in the neighborhood declined by 2,497—but the number of households with dependents who filed income tax returns increased by only 1,259. This is a crude measure, but it suggests that roughly 1,200 people in the neighborhood have left (or been pushed off) welfare but failed to find work.

Wisconsin is a flagship state for welfare reform. Its alleged success is a large reason why former governor Tommy Thompson was tapped to head the federal department of health and human services. Thompson has publicly insisted again and again that anyone who wants work can find it. Is this hypocrisy and dissembling? Of course it is, but that very hypocrisy makes the new welfare/work-support regime much more susceptible to popular pressure than was the AFDC structure of a decade ago. If unions or churches (or organizations like Larry Moore’s) organized Metcalfe Park residents under the banner “WHERE ARE THE JOBS?,” Wisconsin’s political leadership would

have no easy answer. If Metcalfe Park’s 1,483 tax filers who were below the poverty line even after factoring in their earned income tax credits organized to demand a higher minimum wage and/or a higher EITC, the state’s political elite would have, again, no comfortable way to reply. They have declared that work will pay; it’s now the left’s responsibility to make that declaration a true one.

One small mark of progress: On May 30, under pressure from the community group *Esperanza Unida*, a committee of the Milwaukee City Council voted to work toward creating an emergency program of publicly created jobs that would pay at least \$12 an hour plus benefits. The committee took this step explicitly because growing numbers of Milwaukee families are reaching their lifetime welfare time limits. The city council plan raises all sorts of questions (Will the city be allowed to use federal welfare or job-training funds to create such jobs? Will the public sector unions cooperate with the plan?). And at best it will create only five hundred jobs, a small fraction of the city’s need. But at least it suggests the kinds of doors that might be opened with more and better organizing.

Harrington wrote in 1962 that “what is needed if poverty is to be abolished is a return of political debate.” The reality and the suffering of the “invisible poor” had to be injected into the complacent political atmosphere of post-Eisenhower America. We are in a similar bind in 2002—only today the smothering consensus isn’t the myth that We Are All Middle Class. Today’s myth is that the labor market can and will serve us all, if only we reduce taxes (the Republican version) or raise our education levels (the Democratic). The left’s responsibility is to point out that for thirty years, except for a brief blip in 1998–2000, the U.S. economy hasn’t seen anything like true full employment. Like Harrington, we should find the will to move forward, even where we see very little basis for optimism. ●

DAVID GLENN has written for the *Nation*, *Lingua Franca*, and the *New York Times Book Review*.

V. S. Naipaul's Pursuit of Happiness

George Packer

IN OCTOBER 1953, V. S. Naipaul's father died in Port of Spain, Trinidad. He died in disappointment and misery. He had been waiting to see his son, who was finishing a degree at Oxford, and waiting for his own book of stories to find a publisher. All his life he had struggled to be more than a journalist for the Trinidad *Guardian*—to be a writer. V. S. Naipaul had not so much been handed this ambition as become its living extension. "I had always looked upon my life as a continuation of his—a continuation which, I hoped, would also be a fulfillment." To read the letters published recently in *Between Father and Son* is to see where Naipaul got the spareness of his style, right down to the semi-colons.

Naipaul's mother and older sister pleaded with him to come home to Trinidad and take up his family duty. Before his death, his father had asked the same thing, and Naipaul had written from Oxford: "If I did so, I shall die from intellectual starvation." With his father dead, the pressure to return became intense. "Our family was in distress. I should have done something for them, gone back to them. But, without having become a writer, I couldn't go back." And so for three years Naipaul put his family off. He was living in London, writing occasional scripts for the BBC Caribbean Service, and trying to complete the book that would make him a writer and lift his family out of debt.

Years later, Naipaul would come across a de Chirico painting to which Guillaume Apollinaire had given the title *The Enigma of Arrival*. In his book of the same title, Naipaul wrote, "I felt that in an indirect, poetical way the title referred to something in my own experience." It gave him the idea for a story:

My narrator. . . would arrive—for a reason I had yet to work out—at that classical port with the walls and gateways like cutouts. He would walk past that muffled figure on the quayside. He would move from that silence and desolation, that blankness, to a gateway or door. He would enter there and be swallowed by the life and noise of a crowded city. (I imagined something like an Indian bazaar scene.) The mission he had come on—family business, study, religious initiation—would give him encounters and adventures. He would enter interiors, of houses and temples. Gradually there would come to him a feeling that he was getting nowhere; he would lose his sense of mission; he would begin to know only that he was lost. His feeling of adventure would give way to panic. He would want to escape, to get back to the quayside and his ship. But he wouldn't know how. I imagined some religious ritual in which, led on by kindly people, he would unwittingly take part and find himself the intended victim. At the moment of crisis he would come upon a door, open it, and find himself back on the quayside of arrival. He has been saved; the world is as he remembered it. Only one thing is missing now. Above the cut-out walls and buildings there is no mast, no sail. The antique ship has gone. The traveler has lived out his life.

Put this unwritten fantasy alongside the moment when Naipaul chose his vocation over the expectations of his family. It required an immense leap of faith for a young Indian in the grip of "a panic about failing to be what I should be" not to lose his own sense of mission. His letters home, often filled with shame, also display an astonishing assurance: "Look, I am going to be a success as a writer. I know that. I have gambled all my future on that possibility. Do you want to throw your lot with me or don't you?" And yet all his life the enigma of arrival has haunted Naipaul—the sense of living out his life, like the traveler in the unwritten tale, without having achieved his pur-

pose.

The bet paid off. At the end of 1955, he sold his first novel, *The Mystic Masseur*. Half a century and two dozen books later, Naipaul at last has his Nobel Prize.

When the announcement came last fall—after years of rumors, short lists, and steadily avowed indifference from Naipaul himself—an article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* compared the selection to Henry Kissinger's receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. According to Pascale Casanova, Naipaul "disavows his past; he sees himself as an English writer. . . [He] is contemptuous of the peoples of the South, and he is a mouthpiece for extreme conservative and nationalist views." And, as if that weren't bad enough, "His favorite novelist is Balzac."

Through much of his career, Naipaul has been denounced from the left, especially by partisans of third world countries and cultures, those societies that he's called "half-made." Derek Walcott, a fellow West Indian Nobel, attacked the author of *The Enigma of Arrival* as racist. And, as his rejection by the left grew, Naipaul became something of a hero to the right, the one dark-skinned writer who could be counted on to tell the third world what it didn't want to hear about itself. The embrace culminated in this country a decade ago with an invitation for Naipaul to speak before the conservative Manhattan Institute. Last fall, when the World Trade Center attacks and Naipaul's Nobel followed each other in rapid succession, the address to the Manhattan Institute circulated on the Internet.

Its title is "Our Universal Civilization," and in an unspoken way, it takes one back to the crucial period when Naipaul defied his family's wishes and stayed in London to become a writer. Naipaul turns seventy this summer, in the same month that his latest work, a collection of his essays called *The Writer and the World*, including the Manhattan Institute address, is to be published. He appears to have reached the end of his career. His most recent novel, *Half a Life*, turning over much-plowed ground, is barely half a book. V. S. Naipaul seems to have said what he has to say. Seen from this vantage point, the course of his work follows an internal logic that was not at all clear before. The decision not to return to Trinidad,

the pivotal moment of his literary career, also holds the key to the vision that receives its most explicit expression in "Our Universal Civilization." And Naipaul himself turns out not to be what his shallower critics and admirers imagined.

HIS WRITING LIFE falls into three phases. First there was an early, comic phase. Working alarmingly hard, he produced four books while still in his twenties, books about Trinidadian Indians and their marginal lives and strivings and futilities, culminating in the great portrait of his father, *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Trinidad hasn't yet become one of the "half-made societies." Naipaul is recording what he knows from childhood, and everything—even the epic-length *Biswas*—comes across as a dense miniature, befitting the scale of the insular world where he would have faced intellectual starvation. The speed of composition betrays what Naipaul would call "a fear of extinction."

Then, knowing that he had come to the end of his childhood material, and riding the confidence of having written a masterpiece, in the early 1960s Naipaul began to travel. The travel began his middle phase, a severe and tragic phase, for the places he traveled to, repeatedly, even obsessively (back to the West Indies where racial revolution was stirring; then to his ancestral India; and finally to newly independent Africa) brought out a new kind of panic in Naipaul. This wasn't the merely personal raw nerves of a young colonial becoming a writer in the imperial center. His travels put politics in his writing, and his panic became a political panic:

The new politics, the curious reliance of men on institutions they were yet working to undermine, the simplicity of beliefs and the hideous simplicity of actions, the corruption of causes, half-made societies that seemed doomed to remain half-made: these were the things that began to preoccupy me. They were not things from which I could detach myself.

Instead of suppressing this political panic in order to write, he wrote directly out of it—beginning with *The Mimic Men* (1967), a lesser-known novel that marks the start of the new phase, and then in the novels from the 1970s

that made him an international writer: *In a Free State*, *Guerrillas*, and *A Bend in the River*.

The violence that characterizes these books, physical and emotional, confirms that Naipaul could not easily “detach himself.” He had nowhere to go, no position from which to view the world’s disorders with equanimity. The Europeans in these books appear to have a free ride in the third world countries where they seek personal or political fulfillment, dabbling in Caribbean revolution or African authenticity, only to find out in brutal, sometimes fatal ways that the late colonial world has turned back on them in nihilistic rage. A group of expatriates in *A Bend in the River*, set in a thinly disguised Zaire under Mobutu, sit in a room listening to Joan Baez songs, and only the narrator, an Indian from the east coast of Africa, entranced though he is by the sound of the voice, knows that “it was make-believe. . . . You couldn’t listen to sweet songs about injustice unless you expected justice and received it much of the time. You couldn’t sing songs about the end of the world unless—like the other people in that room, so beautiful with such simple things: African mats on the floor and African hangings on the wall and spears and masks—you felt that the world was going on and you were safe in it. How easy it was, in that room, to make those assumptions!” The narrator’s own credo, set down in the opening sentence, is that of a man who lives outside the room, without the luxury of indulgent fantasies: “The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it.”

AND SO NAIPAUL’S great novels from the middle phase gave him the reputation of a conservative. Not only that: a traitor as well, for a writer with brown skin was not supposed to point out the shams and illusions of third world politics. In fact, there’s no use pretending that Naipaul’s political panic made him a sympathetic or even fair interpreter of the post-colonial world. Under his scrutiny Africa in particular is prone to dissolving in a singularly powerful mood of menace, fear, and disgust. Naipaul never tells you what country is inducing these feelings; it is, indiscriminately, “Africa.” After picking up a couple of

African hitchhikers, one of the English expatriates driving through Africa in *In a Free State* (1971), for which Naipaul won the Booker Prize, comments on the “smell of Africa . . . It is a smell of rotting vegetation and Africans. One is very much like the other.”

Guerrillas (1975), about racial disturbance on a Caribbean island, is even uglier. It ends with a scene in which a mixed-race man of revolutionary delusions sodomizes a white Englishwoman who’s taken a passing sexual and political interest in him. Just before leading her out to be slaughtered by machete,

He said, very softly, “You are rotten meat.”

It was his tone, rather than the words, that alarmed her. When she turned over to look at him she saw that his eyes were very bright and appeared sightless, the pupils mere points of glitter. He was still erect and looked very big.

He put his hand lightly on her shoulder and said, “You look frightened, Jane.”

“I’m thinking I have to go back.”

She swung her legs over the edge of the bed, he allowed his hand to slip off her shoulder, and she stood up.

“But I haven’t come, Jane.”

This is the Naipaul most people think they know. The ruthlessness of observation is matched by the precision of language, as if Naipaul can only represent the source of panic with the utmost syntactical control. “The greatest writing is a disturbing vision offered from a position of strength,” he once said. “Aspire to that.” But the idea of a supreme and cold-hearted detachment is an illusion. Naipaul couldn’t enter the experience of his blighted characters as deeply as he does, even in a novel like *Guerrillas*, if he were not writing about rage and despair from the inside.

It was these novels, from the middle phase, that introduced me to Naipaul. I read him before I knew not to like him. I had come back from living in Africa in my early twenties, I was trying to write about it, and Naipaul’s ability to evoke the anxiety and disorientation I was feeling presented a model from which a young writer could learn. I couldn’t feel close to him as I did to other writers—the ugliness was too much—and I was fairly sure that if I met him I wouldn’t like him (Saul Bellow once said that after spending an hour with Naipaul he could

skip Yom Kippur that year). But as a master of literary craft and a writer fearlessly dedicated to a vision, Naipaul inspired, and still does. It didn't matter that his vision of Africa was different from mine and in some ways repelled me. It was the intensity of his commitment that mattered.

A Bend in the River is Naipaul's masterpiece, and also the last novel of the middle phase. Its imaginative range is broader than anything before it. Indians, Europeans, and Africans are all portrayed as individuals caught in the swell of history, trying to realize themselves against their own and the world's limitations. In the middle of the novel there is an extraordinary passage, a monologue filling fifteen pages. Indar, a childhood friend of the narrator—both Indians from the east coast of Africa, meeting again as adults in Mobutu's Zaire—tells the story of how he went down from Oxford to London in search of a career. In the story, he presents himself at India House as a candidate for the Indian diplomatic service and is humiliated by a series of lackeys and time-servers. He leaves in a daze of rage and starts walking along the Thames, playing with a fantasy of going back to his old village life. Then he begins to notice the wrought-iron dolphins on lamp standards along the Embankment, the wrought-iron camels acting as bench supports. And he has an insight:

I understood that London wasn't simply a place that was there, as people say of mountains, but that it had been made by men, that men had given attention to details as minute as those camels.

I began to understand at the same time that my anguish about being a man adrift was false, that for me that dream of home and security was nothing more than a dream of isolation, anachronistic and stupid and very feeble. I belonged to myself alone. I was going to surrender my manhood to nobody. For someone like me there was only one civilization and one place—London, or a place like it. Every other kind of life was make-believe. Home—what for? To hide? To bow to our great men? For people in our situation, led into slavery, that is the biggest trap of all. We have nothing. We solace ourselves with that idea of the great men of our tribe, the Gandhi and the Nehru, and

we castrate ourselves. "Here, take my manhood and invest it for me. Take my manhood and be a greater man yourself, for my sake!" No! I want to be a man myself.

In the middle of his great novel about Africa, Naipaul is suddenly writing the central story of his own life, of his younger self—of that moment when he decided not to return to Trinidad after his father's death. And this would become the constant subject of his third, late phase—an autobiographical phase, an obsessive and, finally, exhausted return to his origins as a writer, in books like *Finding the Center* (1984), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), *A Way in the World* (1994), and last year's *Half a Life*. The anxiety has subsided. The fiction has turned inward, and the nonfiction (for Naipaul has been an equally obsessive traveler, writing journalism about the troubled corners of the world well into his seventh decade) has grown more generous—his portraits of static and decaying societies are no less harsh, but individuals trapped within those societies emerge as the true voices of these books.

THEN WHAT are we to make of the charge that Naipaul has repudiated his background, that he identifies with the oppressor and despises the oppressed? The truth is that Naipaul has no easily identifiable political views. The great ideological struggle of his writing life, the cold war, is totally ignored in his work. He hasn't chosen sides in competing visions of how modern societies should be organized. He is profoundly skeptical of every ideology. What interests him is the individual, and his fiercest passion has always been for the individual to be free from the dead hand of the given. The closest he's come to expressing something like a vision of the good society is the Manhattan Institute talk. In it, he tells the story of a young Indonesian whom he met years ago, and who was thwarted in his desire to become a poet. Naipaul then describes the "universal civilization" that made room for him, a young Indian from Trinidad, when he was trying to become a writer.

I would say that it is the civilization that both gave the prompting and the idea of the literary vocation; and also gave the means to fulfill that

prompting; the civilization that enables me to make that journey from the periphery to the center; the civilization that links me not only to this audience but also that now not-so-young man in Java whose background was as ritualized as my own, and on whom—as on me—the outer world had worked, and given the ambition to write.

It sounds like utter hubris and the worst sort of solipsism: the “universal civilization” is the one that made room for Naipaul to become a writer. And yet, in one form or another, this is the longing of millions of people the world over—those oppressed and nameless masses whom Naipaul is supposed to despise. It is an idea that his critics take entirely for granted.

Looking back over the half-century of his writing life, one can now see that his purpose all along was to give value to that longing. At the end of his talk to the Manhattan Institute, Naipaul suddenly mentions the phrase “the pursuit of happiness.” He says: “So much is contained in it: the idea of the individual, responsibility, choice, the life of the intellect, the idea of vocation and perfectibility and achievement. It is an immense human idea.” Naipaul, often accused of making himself over as an Englishman, turns out to be an American. ●

GEORGE PACKER is the author of *The Village of Waiting*, *The Half Man*, *Central Square*, and *Blood of the Liberals*.

Daniel McClain

1947-2002

HIS NAME wasn't on our masthead. You could find it in six-point type at the bottom of the table of contents: *cover designs by Daniel McClain*. But for five years, since he redesigned our journal, Dan was a strong force at *Dissent*. Each quarter we struggled to find the words that would entice newsstand browsers to pick us up and subscribers to open us up. We would e-mail the titles to Dan and wait for his interpretation. We were rarely disappointed. He made the type breathe, the titles dance. Not that we ever accepted a design without some dissent (he favored modern tones, more kinetic presentation; we wanted bolder color but more traditional placement of type). With each issue he gently nudged us to be more daring, to take design risks. He wasn't happy if he thought he was repeating his work.

We were a small client. When I received news of his death from another editor, I learned that Dan had been awarded several Ellies, the magazine world's equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize. He had never told us this, but we knew when we saw his portfolio that we were lucky to be working with him. His big love was nature, and the magazines he showed us at that first meet-

ing reflected that love: *Audubon*, *Oceans*, *Archaeology*, *Field and Stream*.

After he sold his home in Connecticut and moved to an 1855 house in Maine, we wondered how such an urbane person would fit in. He did so by becoming a volunteer fire fighter. The town had no police or fire department. The snow or wind storms that disrupted overnight service and caused minor delays in *Dissent*'s production schedule meant people without heat or electricity, cars skidding off the road or into each other—Dan brought help. He joked about being an old guy on the team and the strain such work caused his knees and back. Yet he clearly loved this connection to the community as much as he loved the solitude and the beauty.

Dan battled with depression, and a few days after his fifty-fifth birthday he took his life. The following Sunday, members of the fire department—carpenters, tradespeople, physicians, artists—gathered on his land to plant a dogwood tree. The natural beauty will be a reminder of his life and work. We are grateful to him for bringing beauty to us, for expanding our senses, for speaking to us in a different voice.

M.P.

Habits of Mind

THE ANATOMY OF RACIAL INEQUALITY

by Glenn C. Loury

Harvard University Press, 2002 160 pp \$22.95

James T. Campbell

THE RIGHTWARD migration of progressive intellectuals into the ranks of neoconservatism is a leitmotif of twentieth-century American politics. Any reader of *Dissent* can retail half a dozen such stories, each a blend of political disillusionment and personal rancor, principle, and opportunism. Leftward migration by a conservative intellectual is a more novel phenomenon. Alas, it does not necessarily make for a more edifying tale.

Meet the new Glenn Loury. The old Glenn Loury touted supply-side economics and Jack Kemp's enterprise zones; the new Glenn Loury calls for "broad-based, system-wide interventions" to attack the "national disgrace" of racial inequality. The old Loury exhorted African Americans to stop bleating about "racism" and to focus on "the enemy within"—welfare dependency, teenage pregnancy, and other "problematic behaviors" of the so-called "underclass." The new Loury describes the plight of black Americans as a "collective" tragedy for which "the entire nation bears a responsibility." The old Loury enjoyed lavish support from Republican foundations and regular access to such journals as *American Enterprise* and *Commentary*. The new Loury bites the hand that once fed him, deriding "conservative commentators" for their "simplistic social ethics and sophomoric social psychology."

In the spring of 2000, Loury was invited to deliver the W.E.B. Du Bois lectures at Harvard University. The event had all the trappings of a political rehabilitation, as the notorious neoconservative was gathered back into the

fold by Henry Louis Gates, William Julius Wilson, and the other neoliberal luminaries of Harvard's (now depleted) Afro-American Studies' "Dream Team." *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* presents the lectures he delivered on the occasion.

Loury was the most interesting of the Reagan-era black neoconservatives. Defiantly iconoclastic, intellectually self-confident to the point of arrogance, he was also palpably insecure. A servant to the very rich, he remained a working-class chauvinist who took pride in his roots on Chicago's South Side. He came to success early. Trained in economics at M.I.T., he pioneered the concept of "social capital," the web of informal "connections," associations, and networks of information that condition economic success. Upon finishing his dissertation, he migrated up the Charles River to Harvard, where in 1982 he became the first African American to secure tenure in the department of economics. In 1991, he moved across the Charles to accept a chaired professorship at John Silber's Boston University.

For all his academic distinction, Loury owed his public visibility to his work as spokesman for the Reagan Revolution, especially during Ronald Reagan's second term. In contrast to Thomas Sowell, who acted the part of right-wing race man for most of the first term, Loury made a plausible spokesman, lacing conservative bromides about self-help, moral rearmament, and the perils of affirmative action with a healthy dose of black nationalism. Black Americans had the responsibility and the right to control their own destinies, he argued. Ultimately, their salvation would come from their own efforts, not from following the false prophets of the "middle-class" civil rights establishment and certainly not from trafficking with the "anti-capitalist, envy-mongering left."

Yet even as Loury reached the pinnacle of political success, his life spun out of control.

According to a profile in the *New York Times Magazine* (January 20, 2002) he led a double life during his last years at Harvard, lecturing by day and trolling the streets at night, free-basing cocaine and enacting many of the same "pathological" behaviors he decried in his writing. In 1987, he was nominated as undersecretary of education by William Bennett, but withdrew amid charges that he had assaulted his young mistress. A few months later, he was arrested for cocaine possession.

Although not exactly Paul on the road to Damascus, Loury did some soul searching. He entered a drug treatment program. He joined a church and was "born again." Most important, he looked anew at his right-wing masters. Though still unequivocally a conservative, the Loury of the early 1990s was less predictable, less willing to toe the party line. In 1994, he lashed out at conservatives for their uncritical embrace of *The Bell Curve*, Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's thinly veiled attack on black intelligence. (*Commentary* declined to publish his review of the book.) A year later, he resigned from the American Enterprise Institute over its support for Dinesh D'Souza's execrable *The End of Racism*. In 1996, he left the Center for New Black Leadership, an organization he had founded with Shelby Steele, in a dispute over California's Proposition 209, which eliminated affirmative action. Though not yet prepared to endorse affirmative action, Loury freely registered his reservations about the proposition, as well as his skepticism of the morality of those who, in the name of "race-blindness," blithely tolerated the most appalling racial inequality. In 1999, Loury was formally drummed out of the conservative camp by Norman Podhoretz, a man who knows something about apostasy.

ROOTED IN economic theory but ranging freely across disciplines, *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* is as unclassifiable as its author. The questions, at least, are clear. How is racial inequality reproduced in a society in which discrimination by race has been legally abolished? How do we combat it? This is hardly a new problem. Bayard Rustin posed it in an influential 1964 essay, written before passage of the Civil Rights Act. In the decades

since, innumerable scholars, pundits, and politicians have weighed in, highlighting everything from de-industrialization to progressive demobilization to Sartrean "bad faith," not to mention the endless variations on "culture of poverty" theory. Yet however familiar the question rings, it remains profoundly important, particularly today, with the Supreme Court apparently poised to deliver the coup de grâce to affirmative action.

Loury's argument advances along two broad fronts. The first centers on the concept of "stigma." Slavery, he argues, inscribed a stigma on black bodies, a badge of dishonor that has persisted long after the institution's abolition. Extending an argument first made by Gunnar Myrdal, Loury shows how this stigma operates as a self-fulfilling prophecy, with whites, persuaded of black people's flawed character and inferior capacity, acting in ways that distort character and diminish capacity, thus confirming the original presumption. He underscores the argument with a series of short (sometimes dubious) "thought experiments" designed to illuminate the "vicious circles of cumulative causation" through which racial disparities are perpetuated and reproduced.

In promoting "stigma" over more familiar concepts such as "racism" and "discrimination," Loury has several goals in mind. Most obviously, he hopes to move discussions of race away from what he sees as fruitless moralizing: the sources of America's race problem, he insists, lay not in the realm of morality but in the realm of "cognition," in processes of meaning, classification, interpretation. Where the old Loury might have used such logic to deflect or minimize allegations of racism, his intent here is to highlight the severity of the problem. "Stigma" entails more than distaste for certain groups or a susceptibility to negative "stereotypes." It represents nothing less than a "withholding of the presupposition of common humanity" from an entire class of people. The problem is not simply in our institutions but in ourselves, embedded and reproduced in the very ways in which we see, interpret, and act upon the world. We are "cognitive prisoners."

Loury interweaves "stigma" with a second argument, growing out of his early work on so-

cial capital. Antidiscrimination policies enacted in the civil rights era, he argues, may have succeeded in abolishing discrimination in formal political and economic institutions—"discrimination in contract"—but they have done little to redress "discrimination in contact." Though nominally accepted as full citizens, African Americans continue to bear the burden of social exclusion, rooted in their continuing stigmatization. Not only do they lack access to the associations and connections vital to professional preferment, but they are deprived of the enriching interactions and experiences that enable human beings to discover and develop their talents in the first place.

Whether the argument is proffered in terms of contact or cognition, the prospect Loury sketches is utterly bleak. Racial inequality is not simply a vestige of our nation's "unlovely past" but an unfolding reality, routinely reproduced by ordinary, decent, rational people. It is woven into the fabric of our lives—our perceptions, our preferences, our personal relationships. As such, it is all but impervious to desegregation orders, antidiscrimination laws, and other traditional "liberal" remedies. (Loury still manages to make "liberal" sound like an epithet.) Curiously for a book heralding its author's break with conservatism, the voice that emerges from the pages is that of Dwight Eisenhower, warning his countrymen that no amount of legislative legerdemain can alter the "hearts and minds" of men. Indeed, in one remarkable passage, Loury goes even further, suggesting that the dynamics of racial inequality, rooted as they are in the "complex interactions of myriad, autonomous decision makers," may be beyond "human agency" altogether.

AS EVEN THIS bare summary suggests, there is much to ponder here. Loury's analysis, although perhaps less epochal than he implies, does illuminate some of the mechanisms by which racial disparity is reproduced. Equally important, it helps us to see how such disparity comes to seem "natural and non-dissonant" to observers, a process that is vital to understanding the otherwise bewildering absence of empathy in America today. You say that more than a third of black children grow up in severe poverty? That African Ameri-

cans, roughly 12 percent of the population, represent a majority of the nation's prisoners? Well, what can you do? That's just how "they" are.

Unfortunately—or rather fortunately—the book also offers ample scope for criticism. For someone forever condemning others as "ahistorical," Loury is a very poor historian. Indeed, aside from the early allusions to the stigma of slavery, there is no history in the book—not a word about Reconstruction and its aftermath, the Great Migration, the New Deal, the civil rights movement (!), or the twenty-year long assault on the black poor by Loury's erstwhile right-wing cronies. Similarly, for someone who speaks of the need for broad "structural" change, Loury is curiously inattentive to social structure. Certainly informal processes of cognition and contact are important, but can we really fathom the reproduction of racial inequality—or devise ways to combat it—without at least some consideration of the changing shape of the American labor market, the crisis of public education, the role of federal housing and transportation policies in underwriting segregation, changes in welfare policy, differential access to health care, and so forth? Whether sustained historical and structural analysis would lead to a more hopeful conclusion is an open question, but at the very least it would suggest that American race relations are hardly as unchanging as Loury believes. It would also surely reveal the continuing reality of formal racial discrimination in the United States, and hence the continuing relevance of antidiscrimination law.

Loury's inattention to historical and political context is most obvious in his use of "thought experiments." A misbegotten offspring of behaviorism, neoclassical economics, and rational choice theory, the thought experiment has a dubious history in poverty research, most notoriously in Charles Murray's 1982 book *Losing Ground*, the bible of the antiwelfare movement. Murray used an imaginary couple, Harold and Phyllis, to show how public assistance victimized the poor, by rewarding indolence and out-of-wedlock childbirth. Loury, mercifully, no longer traffics in that rot—he even includes a short critique of rational-choice theory—yet his thought experiments likewise

present people in contextual vacuums, responding "rationally" to perceived "incentives."

The most egregious example occurs in a thought experiment on affirmative action, introduced to illustrate the "vicious circles" idea. Loury sets predictable parameters: applications to a college or professional school reveal a "substantial disparity in the academic merit of black and white applicants"; admission officers, in order to "meet their racial diversity goals," admit black applicants with lower qualifications. "[C]onsider the incentives for achievement that will have been created," he writes. Black students will recognize the lower standard and perhaps slack off, while white students, anticipating more exacting scrutiny, will exert greater effort (or, one is tempted to suggest, file lawsuits for reverse discrimination). The net effect is to perpetuate the disparity in achievement, confirming the original belief that black applicants require preferential treatment. "Had the officers steadfastly stuck to racially uniform standards," Loury suggests, "they might thereby have created a factual circumstance in which their diversity goals could be met without any use of race in the admissions process."

The fallacies are obvious. Even if one accepts the existence of a racial disparity in "academic merit," it is hard to imagine that the "biased social cognition" of college admissions officers has much to do with it, and harder still to believe that adopting a unitary standard—that is, abolishing affirmative action—would solve the problem. (The Supreme Court may soon give us an opportunity to test that proposition.) The important point, for present purposes, is simply to note the perils of decontextualization. If one truly wants to understand unequal educational attainment, surely the first place to look is to the yawning racial disparities in American public education.

The discussion of affirmative action is of particular interest, because it provides a benchmark to measure Loury's transformation. Clearly he has changed. The old Loury warned of diluting standards and undermining black self confidence. The new Loury dismisses critics of affirmative action as hypocritical and "indifferent," and professes himself "not at all reluctant" to defend the policy. Yet, as that formulation suggests, he remains curiously con-

flicted on the issue. Affirmative action receives "too much attention," he complains; pundits' preoccupation with the issue bespeaks "intellectual shallowness." "I desperately want to avoid having the far-reaching implications of my argument projected onto the narrow and partisan grounds of the debate over race preferences," he writes plaintively.

WHY IS LOURY so reticent about affirmative action? Perhaps he is reluctant to invest political capital in a policy that appears foredoomed. Perhaps he is trying to mask the gnawing insecurity he himself feels as a possible beneficiary of the policy. (The old Loury used to warn about that sort of thing.) Perhaps he simply cannot bring himself to defend a policy epitomizing the kind of "liberal" social engineering he spent nearly twenty years denouncing. But whatever the explanation, there is no mistaking his ambivalence. The irony (at risk of indulging in the sort of shallow reductionism he pleads against) is that affirmative action would appear to be the perfect prescription for responding to Loury's diagnosis. Not only does it address deficits of social capital, by projecting previously excluded groups into the kinds of educational and professional settings in which such capital is accrued, but it has also created unprecedented opportunities for black and white Americans to interact in conditions of at least relative equality, thus helping to interrupt the cycle of biased social cognition. To be sure, affirmative action is no panacea. It is not (nor was it intended to be) a jobs or antipoverty program. But it has been crucially important in combating both historic and current processes of racial exclusion. It deserves better than this kind of tepid, apologetic support.

The same might be said of antidiscrimination laws, which Loury continually disparages. To be sure, civil rights legislation alone will not end racial inequality, which is indeed embedded in the structure of our economic, political, and social lives. Such laws seem especially toothless today, thanks to judicial decisions that have narrowed their compass to next to nothing. (In this, as in so many other ways, the late twentieth century uncannily echoes the late nineteenth century.) But antidiscrimination

laws have not been inconsequential either, and we “dem.ote” them (to use Loury’s phrase) at our peril. African Americans today sit on juries. They enjoy access to public facilities all over the country, including hundreds of state universities from which they were legally excluded as recently as the 1960s. They take out mortgages and life insurance policies. They sometimes pay more to get them, but the differential is a fraction of what it was a generation ago and it narrows by the year, thanks to legal action brought under the rubric of the Civil Rights Act. Most important, black people vote and hold public office. (Tellingly, the Voting Rights Act does not even appear in the index of Loury’s book.)

There is even evidence to suggest that, contrary to Eisenhower’s admonition, changes in law do affect people’s “hearts and minds.” A generation or two ago, many white Americans were prepared to kill to preserve racial segregation in restaurants and bus station waiting rooms. Today, those same people share public facilities with black people without a second thought. Interracial marriages, illegal in thirty-seven states not so long ago, are today legal and increasingly commonplace; and if they still provoke raised eyebrows, and sometimes worse, they are no longer an invitation to murder. These are not trivial gains. The very fact that right-wingers determined to roll back the legislative legacy of the civil rights movement have had to resort to “coded,” ostensibly race neutral appeals is itself perverse proof of how far we have come.

To encompass this dual reality, to discern the glimmers of hope and political possibility in the racial storm billowing around us requires historical imagination, analytical balance, and a broad tolerance for ambiguity—precisely the qualities that Loury, in both old and new incarnations, has always lacked. In their absence, he has written a most peculiar book, at once a rousing call for immediate action to combat an

enemy that threatens our moral and political life and a grim appraisal of the utter inadequacy of the weapons at our disposal. The effect is a bit like listening to a pedantic physician explain all the reasons that your tumor is inoperable.

IN THE FINAL sections of the book, Loury makes some efforts to escape the cul-de-sac into which he has argued himself. He alludes to the need for broad, structural transformation, but offers no further specification. He stresses the importance of black self-help, a consistent strain in his thinking, and devotes an inordinate amount of time to defending the legitimacy of black institutions against the imagined objections of doctrinaire, “color blind” liberals. And, of course, he indulges in liberal bashing, a sport that suits both his old conservative and his new radical identities. Unfortunately, his portrayal of liberalism is so caricatured and capacious—referring variously to liberal theories of justice and to neoclassical economics, to Great Society statism and to Reaganite conservatism—as to be incoherent.

In the end, Loury is reduced to exhortation. “What is required . . . is a commitment on the part of the public, the political elite, the opinion-shaping media, and so on to take responsibility for such situations as the contemporary plight of the urban black poor, and to understand them in a general way as a consequence of an ethically indefensible past.” “Adopt as an axiom from the outset a belief in the equal humanity of these sons and daughters of slaves.” We need a “paradigm shift,” a “common baseline of historical memory,” an “a priori commitment” to racial equality. From his lips to God’s ear. But how, short of divine intervention, are we to get there? Readers will find no answers to that question in this book. ●

JAMES T. CAMPBELL is an associate professor of American Civilization, Africana Studies, and History at Brown University.

The Chinese Market: An Enigma Unraveled

THE CHINA DREAM: THE QUEST FOR THE
LAST GREAT UNTAPPED MARKET ON EARTH

by Joe Studwell

Atlantic Monthly Press, 2002 256 pp \$22

INEQUALITY AND POVERTY IN CHINA IN THE
AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

by Azizur Rahman Khan and Carl Riskin

Oxford University Press, 2001 240 pp \$45

Stephen F. Diamond

THIS SPRING, workers pushed out of China's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) unleashed a wave of protests that began in the famed Daqing oilfields of northwest China, now owned by the partially privatized PetroChina Company. They staged massive, though largely peaceful, demonstrations against the meager severance payments and health care benefits they were left with in the wake of widespread layoffs.

The job cuts are the price paid by workers as part of a restructuring of the oil industry engineered by the Chinese communist regime with the guidance of an army of Western consultants that includes PricewaterhouseCoopers, Goldman Sachs, and McKinsey and Co.

The oil workers' protests were soon followed by others in several industrial districts in China and included small but unprecedented demonstrations inside Beijing itself. The situation has been brewing for some time, with similar demonstrations occurring with greater frequency in the past few years. University of Michigan sociologist Ching Lee describes these events as a "veritable labor insurgency." Whether or not this wave of unrest will lead to a final reckoning with the communist regime or whether that regime will be able to manage a secure transition to some new

form of authoritarian capitalism is an open question.

Joe Studwell's *The China Dream* draws on his decade of firsthand experience writing for the international financial press from China. Studwell edits the *China Economic Quarterly*, an independent and reliable source of information about China's economy. The value of his book is that it helps the reader move away from the traditional framework that the outside world usually applies to China. There is no question that the movement for civil liberties evidenced by the battle of the Falun Gong for religious freedom, the Tibetans for national liberation, or the Chinese working class for jobs and independent unions are critical social struggles. But Studwell asks the reader to focus on the impact that important changes to that country's economic and financial structure can have on political change, a relationship that has been misunderstood in the past.

It is instructive to look at what happened in Eastern Europe. When I visited Poland during the martial law period of the late 1980s, I had a lengthy and intense discussion—animated, perhaps inevitably, by a good deal of vodka—with several underground Solidarity activists in the textile district of Lodz. Their near fanatical adherence to the free market ideology of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman was truly unsettling. But the emergence of this ideology in Solidarity was all but ignored by Western activists backing the campaign of workers to democratize communist Poland.

Sure enough, the new postcommunist regime led by former Solidarity activists implemented a brutal form of shock therapy, attempting to impose a free market economy overnight. This helped the labor union side of Solidarity reemerge to lead a strike wave that threw out the government, which was replaced by former communists! Ever since, there has been in Poland a kind of socio-economic im-

passe, with a significant private sector in consumer goods, light industry, agriculture, and small shops, but state ownership maintained in many large industrial plants (at least those that have not been shut down completely).

Studwell describes a similar phenomenon in China, but this time the regime has implemented the Polish program without losing power. In the early eighties, it partially freed up prices in the agricultural sector and allowed farmers to retain a portion of their profits. This, in turn, unleashed pent-up demand for consumer goods, and so the regime went one step further, endorsing the new light industry and consumer goods businesses that began to emerge in the rural townships and villages. These Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) provided the bulk of the alleged Chinese miracle.

The results in this “golden age” were truly astounding. Studwell describes the emergence of an “extraordinary virtuous circle” whereby higher prices for food stimulated demand for basic consumer products like bicycles, televisions, and refrigerators and, increasingly, for light industrial goods such as tractors. This process sustained growth rates averaging 9 percent for most of the 1980s. Studwell notes that non-farm employment tripled from thirty million to ninety-three million people in that decade alone, with some sixteen million new businesses established. These new entities are seen by Western Sinophiles as evidence of the emergence of a new private entrepreneurial class in China that will allow the country, in the words of mainstream economist Barry Naughton, to “grow out of the Plan.”

BUT MANY of the TVEs were formed with local state and party official endorsement and participation. They have become a new competing power center in Chinese society, absorbing scarce financial resources. They are also the source of huge new income inequalities. In their articulate and thorough study *Inequality and Poverty in China*, economists Azizur Rahman Khan and Carl Riskin look at the impact of market reforms and find disturbing results. Communist Party reformer Deng Xiaoping had declared “let some get rich first,” and the lucky few have done so with a

vengeance. Although the country has indeed registered huge gains in national income during the last twenty years, the gains have not been equally reflected in the personal income of ordinary Chinese households. Khan and Riskin note that “between 1988 and 1995 inequality in the distribution of income in China increased sharply [as] China [became] one of the more unequal of the Asian developing countries.” In rural China, the TVEs have actually worsened income inequality as the enterprises offer higher wages but to only a small portion of the workforce, most of whom survive at or below the poverty line on whatever their backyard plots of land can produce.

The new so-called private sector has nowhere near the resources to take on the huge industrial needs of Chinese society. The single largest fully private entity in China has annual revenues of six hundred million dollars, half the turnover of the lowest-ranked company on the Fortune 1000 list. Even today this sector contributes only one-eighth of the nation’s gross domestic product and employs fewer than twenty million workers in a nation of 1.2 billion people. In any case, the apparent economic miracle began to slow precipitously after the initial boost in the eighties. In the early 1990s, Studwell reveals, it was discovered that the TVEs “had overstated production by more than 40 percent,” wiping out a hundred billion dollars from the country’s national income accounts.

The regime’s heavy capital investment created much of the actual gain in GNP, thus exacerbating inequality and poverty. Khan and Riskin identify what is called “investment hunger,” especially among local governments that are now less constrained by Beijing. “The state allowed an expansion of credit to pump up accumulation and drive a wedge between growth of GDP and that of personal income.” Thus, they conclude, despite the impressive macro level gains of the 1980s, as the 1990s unfolded there was “an unusually rapid widening of income inequality . . . a much retarded rate of poverty reduction in the countryside . . . and a significant increase in absolute poverty in the towns and cities.”

The SOEs still control the “commanding heights” of the economy—steel, oil, autos, air-

planes, and so on. In comparison to the country's largest fully private firm, together the two state-owned oil companies have revenues of more than eighty billion dollars and are comfortably placed on the Fortune Asia 25 list. In this sector, one finds that instead of the massive privatization that took place in the former Soviet Union with such disastrous effect, the regime has continued to feed the enterprises massive amounts of credit, recycling the savings of China's billion people into outdated and poor-performing industrial behemoths.

THESE ENTERPRISES are truly from a different age—the age of Soviet-influenced heavy industry or the American variant, the massive auto complex at Ford's River Rouge. These plants were, like their Soviet, American, or East European counterparts, impressive achievements—fifty years ago. But by world terms today, they are bankrupt. The regime is in a trap of its own making. Having created this heavy industrial base, it has also created a massive industrial working class—or rather, its working class created this massive industrial base, through brutal forced labor in the fifties and sixties. But to restructure now in a fashion that would allow these companies to be globally competitive will require huge layoffs and huge new capital investment. To make the PetroChina initial public offering credible to global capital markets required the layoff of hundreds of thousands and a promise to push billions in debts back to its state-owned parent company.

The regime believes that the only way it can preserve its own power is to keep “muddling through,” in Studwell's words. Thus, the regime allows foreign companies to set up assembly plants in the special economic zones in coastal areas and, in the niches not already occupied by the state sector, encourages a limited domestic private sector to evolve from below. But it cannot allow the resulting inequalities and poverty this process causes to become so extreme that workers revolt. The regime fears a social explosion, called by the Chinese *da luan*, or total chaos, a fear made real by the labor insurgency now underway in the oilfields run by PetroChina. The pall of Hungary in 1956 and Poland in 1980 hangs over the Chi-

nese communists.

Meanwhile, the regime feeds enough credit to the SOEs to keep them alive, conditioning the credit on hoped-for restructuring, but not giving so much credit that inflation is unleashed. Inflation has been a continuing problem, causing the regime to punctuate the growth of the last two decades with periods of harsh austerity. What many in the West view as a struggle between hard- and soft-liners, or between a Maoist left and a market socialist right, is really a reflection of managing a business cycle with “Chinese characteristics.”

This is a risky business. The price controls of the late 1980s certainly tamed an inflation rate that reached 50 percent in 1988, but the austerity was a key factor in triggering the 1989 social revolt centered in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. The protests received widespread popular support with marches of a million workers or more in several major cities. The regime could only kill the movement by relying on the murderous efficiency of crack troops from the People's Liberation Army. After hundreds were killed, controlling wages was much less of a problem for several years.

But “muddling through” may not be sufficient. The credit that sustains the process must come from somewhere. The free trade zones on the Chinese coast are fed by foreign direct investment. But the SOEs and the domestic private sector rely on the recycling of the huge savings of ordinary Chinese people. Since the banking system is state owned and, in theory, the *renminbi* is not convertible into foreign currencies, Chinese workers, peasants, and small businesses are forced to finance the continued capital accumulation drive of the communist regime. The whole game depends on the regime's continuing top-down control of that financial system. Thus, Studwell notes, promises in the early 1980s that the currency would be convertible as early as 1993 are now put off well into the future.

Of course, if the *renminbi* were freely tradable on the world markets, and if ordinary Chinese savers could freely hold their savings in foreign banks or invest them in the equities of European or American companies as their counterparts do in the West and much of Asia, there would be a massive bank run as the value

of Chinese assets would be forced to come into line with global values. The pressure on domestic values is so great, Studwell argues, that even without convertibility or an opening of the financial sector, a bank run is still a possibility. "Everything comes down to psychology . . . the psychology of the ordinary Chinese people," he notes.

From this vantage point, events like those of 1989 take on new meaning. In Studwell's eyes, here is where the world may finally wake up from its China Dream. In the case of China, the "hot money" that sparked the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s is actually represented by the domestic savings of ordinary Chinese. The regime's credibility, and therefore its power, depends on maintaining the credibility of its economic policy. It is not just that the regime fears a Solidarity-like protest movement rising up in reaction to political repression or unemployment; it also fears the tearing away of the veil that covers up the country's financial fragility. This could cause the population to lose faith in the regime and, in turn, trigger a massive political upheaval.

WHAT ARE the escape routes for the regime? A massive debt-for-equity swap is one. Because the debts the state has piled up using domestic savings must actually be repaid and in the meantime must pay interest, they can get very expensive. The state-owned banks now hold massive amounts of nonperforming loans made to the SOEs and the TVEs. And the government has huge unfunded pension liabilities. Studwell estimates a debt to equity ratio of nearly 500 percent for the state sector—outstripping even South Korea on the verge of its economic collapse in 1997. By creating stock markets, the regime has tried to encourage Chinese savers to invest instead in equity issued by these same state companies. The regime dreams of mutual funds rescuing it from the pension trap it faces. Equity holders typically expect capital gains over time and hope that inside managers will pay out regular dividends, but neither is legally mandated. Corporate insiders in China need not fear the disciplinary effect of a potential takeover by competitors or financial players because there is, as of yet, no competi-

tive market for corporate control in China. This shift to equity finance explains the stock market mania that hit China in the 1990s. The regime engaged, it appears, in a massive "pump and dump" scheme touting share ownership in companies that may actually be worthless. In the first half of 1992, the Shanghai stock market index registered a gain of 1200 percent.

A second strategy has been to turn to foreign stock markets, first in Hong Kong, but more recently to the New York Stock Exchange. There, Chinese companies have had less success. The pump and dump has not fooled quite as many investors. Whereas Chinese companies trade their stock both at home and on the Hong Kong exchange, the shares sold in Hong Kong, Studwell notes, trade at a substantial discount, as much as 85 percent, giving some idea of the discount factor that one might have to apply to the entire Chinese economy if its assets were freely tradable.

Finally, the regime has encouraged the establishment of foreign investment in the so-called Special Economic Zones. But even their explosive growth makes a small dent in this massive country. More important, their potential future growth is limited. Most of these plants are only final assembly points in a global assembly line, so that the value added by Chinese workers is a small percentage of top-line revenue. The sector shipped \$150 billion worth of goods in 2000, but less than 25 percent of that was value added in the free trade areas in China. The state sector cannot compete in quality and reliability with the foreign suppliers that feed parts into the assembly plants. In addition, the companies are heavily dependent on the infrastructure provided by coastal proximity to Hong Kong and Taiwan. Interestingly, as Khan and Riskin note, despite what free trade theory might predict, the industrialization in this and the TVE sectors "so far . . . have been quite employment-hostile" with a "drastic" decline in increases in employment even as output spurred ahead.

Studwell and Khan and Riskin slowly but surely puncture the China Dream. Western companies that thought the era of reform would open up a market of 1.2 billion consumers are, Studwell says, "waiting for Godot."

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been wasted on exploratory projects pushed by overly ambitious Western CEOs, investment bankers, and government trade representatives. The reality is that China is still controlled by an opaque undemocratic regime that has its own plans. Its drive to accumulate and to compete with the rest of the world on the basis of that accumulation process has not lessened despite appearances to the contrary.

IS THERE A viable alternative? Perhaps. Studwell wants the state to get out of the economy altogether, yet he argues that only state power can simultaneously prevent the collapse of the currency and the banking system and keep the lid on social protest. More promisingly, Khan and Riskin outline an ambitious set of policy reforms that emphasize balanced growth and social equity. Unfortunately, they leave out any assessment of

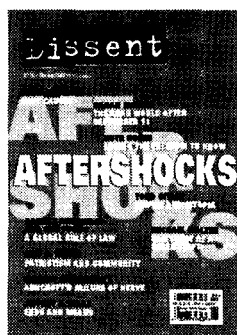
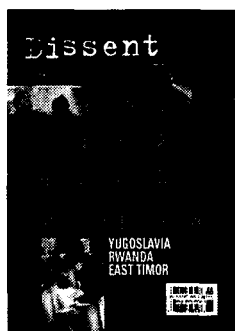
the political reality of modern China. They suggest that the state must undertake these reforms, but there is scant evidence of any significant base of support within the existing Chinese state interested in balance and equity as opposed to accumulation and competition. As they rightly point out, the regime consciously set about to *increase* inequality in order to force competition among sectors of the population.

If the direction in which Khan and Riskin point—a process of genuine economic development in China based on balance and equity—became part of the program of an independent and democratic Chinese labor movement, then a very different future for the country could open up. ●

STEPHEN F. DIAMOND teaches international economic law at the Santa Clara University School of Law in Santa Clara, California.

The New Killing Fields

Massacre & the Politics of Humanitarian Intervention



Introduce your students to our extraordinary Winter 2002 issue, which brings together in one collection the essays of some of the most accomplished and engaged journalists and public intellectuals working today. Many of these authors have written full-length books on these subjects. Here, their essays function both as introductions and supplements to their longer work. Nowhere else will you find such a diverse yet highly focused examination of these issues.

Accounts from Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and East Timor by such writers as David Rieff, Peter Maass, Joanne Barkan, Bill Berkeley, Darryl Li, Geoffrey Robinson, and Erin Trowbridge, essays by Nicolaus Mills, Michael Walzer, and Michael Ignatieff, and book essays by Susie Linfield, Laura Secor, and Jeffrey C. Isaac give your students perspective and depth.

In addition, the Spring issue of *Dissent* continues the discussion with articles by William Shawcross, Kira Brunner, George Packer, Richard Lloyd Parry, and Samantha Power.

For information about classroom orders, e-mail: editors@dissentmagazine.org or call 212-316-3120.

A Fugitive From Utopia

The Prose of Adam Zagajewski

John Palattella

SOLIDARITY, SOLITUDE:
ESSAYS BY ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI
trans. Lillian Vallee
Ecco, 1990, 240 pp \$19.95

**TWO CITIES: ON EXILE, HISTORY,
AND THE IMAGINATION**
trans. Lillian Vallee
Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1995; University of
Georgia, 2002, 272 pp \$18.95

ANOTHER BEAUTY
trans. Clare Cavanagh
Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000; University of
Georgia, 2002, 240 pp \$18.95

“TO WRITE THE history of one’s own literary adventures—what could be more pretentious?” There is any number of living poets for whom this statement is true, but to find it in *Another Beauty*, the most recent prose collection by the Polish poet Adam Zagajewski, is like stumbling into a practical joke. After all, Zagajewski, who was born in 1945, was a child of communist Poland, and his “literary adventures” included all sorts of loud protests against one of the most totalitarian of fathers, the Stalinist state. As a university student in Krakow in the late 1960s, Zagajewski co-founded an influential poetic circle called *Teraz* (“Now”), which was committed to exposing the paradoxes and ideological lies of communism. In 1974, he and fellow poet Julian Kornhauser sparked a major literary controversy when they published *The Unrepresented World*, an essay collection that condemned the allegorical writing of the previous decade for its moral evasiveness and advanced a “critical realism” capable of boring

through the Soviet-speak of everyday life.

It’s a remarkable résumé, and one that an older Zagajewski—who has lived in Paris since 1982 and has taught during spring semesters at the University of Houston since 1988—has repeatedly downplayed. In *Solidarity, Solitude*, published in Poland in 1986, Zagajewski coolly explains that when he wrote *The Unrepresented World*, he took his place “among the Catos of the world for a while, among those who know what literature should be and ruthlessly exact those standards from others. . . . To read it à la lettre, my God, what backwardness.” In *Another Beauty*, self-reproach has crystallized into utter disbelief: “I apparently wrote whole manifestos proclaiming the triumph of a ‘young literature.’” At those moments in *Another Beauty* when Zagajewski does let his dissident self shuffle across the historical stage, it’s not to reenact his skirmishes with state censors. Instead, Zagajewski matter-of-factly describes Our Hero as one of many ill-taught poets clad in the standard uniform of black sweater and leather coat dusted with dandruff.

American readers who relish the cold war view of Central Europe as a kind of literary Byzantium, a region of calamity where art springs from historical necessity and wields unshakable moral authority, may protest that Zagajewski’s deflation of his dissident activities is a betrayal. Let them gripe. Judging from “Central Europe,” a short sketch in his second prose collection in English, *Two Cities*, it seems that Zagajewski is the one who feels betrayed by a certain highbrow obsession with Central European tragedy. While sitting in a café, Zagajewski is approached by “an unremarkable, tiny man with greasy hair combed flat across his head who, without waiting for permission,” joins his table. “Where are you from?” the man asks. No sooner does Zagajewski say “Poland” than a stream of blurbish clichés gushes from the tiny man’s mouth: “Force of conviction.

Categorical feelings. Moral integrity. A literature that is not alienated from the polis." The tiny man asks Zagajewski a few questions, but before he can respond the man abruptly leaves and installs himself before a writer from Prague. As for Zagajewski, "I paid for two coffees and left."

Zagajewski is a champion of solitude. By that I do not mean isolation but a realm of self-reflection and privacy, a state of mind sensitive to the patterns of history but not reduced to their cipher. "The collective man in Poland rejects totalitarianism, despises it and rejects it energetically," Zagajewski observes in *Solidarity, Solitude* in an essay written in the early 1980s, "but he does this as a man who is still collective—instead of as a man who is collected within himself." Indeed, in the poem "A Warsaw Gathering," written in November 1981, shortly before the imposition of martial law, a collective opposition to totalitarianism produces a compulsory, pinched language of its own: "the left, the right, the thumb, the lightening, / the vixen, the virgin, the lioness, society, / Allegiance, the Consequences, Consciousness, / We've Been Through That Before, God Patriot, the Latest / News, the Great Community." Meanwhile, in the back row, "the author of this little poem is sitting and dreaming of / music, music." The "collective man" clings to what Zagajewski mocks, the involuntary power of "history, that never sleeps or dies, / And, held one moment, burns the hand," to borrow some lines from W.H. Auden. For Zagajewski, it's as though communism spawned not one but two unsavory utopias—the classless paradise of the state and the visionary country of the opposition—and solitude was a casualty of both.

ZAGAJEWSKI'S PROSE would be little more than an intellectual curiosity if it was nothing but a collection of such romantic *pensées* and ironic jabs, the work of a Polish poet writing in the shadow of Witold Gombrowicz. A novelist and polemicist, Gombrowicz, who died in 1969, was admired by many writers of Zagajewski's generation for the extended prose sneer of his Argentinean exile. In August 1939, with a single novel to his name, Gombrowicz was invited by the Pol-

ish government to sail on the maiden voyage of the ocean liner *Boleslaw Chrobry*. He was to be an ambassador of Polish culture to Argentina's Polish émigré community. But his mission changed a few days after the *Chrobry* docked in Buenos Aires, when Germany invaded Poland on September 1. Instead of returning home to serve in the military, Gombrowicz remained in Buenos Aires, and for the next three decades he repaid the Polish government the favor of his passage by writing polemics against Polish cultural nationalism. He became an ambassador of impudence. In his novel *Trans-Atlantyk*, the first work he wrote during his exile, and his three-volume *Diary*, he argued that Polish writers are individuals only in a superficial sense. They are social institutions, he claims in his *Diary*, "inhibited by something impersonal, superior, inter-human and collective emanating from the milieu ... Polish thought, Polish mythology, the Polish psyche." His *Diary* was a calculated affront to that psyche. Consider its opening words: "Monday Me. Tuesday Me. Wednesday Me. Thursday Me." Gombrowicz wanted nothing less than to liberate Poles from the false and constraining loyalties of Polish legend.

When Zagajewski broke with the avant-garde he was also rejecting various chimeras of the Polish legend. "To be a Pole, to participate in the work of Polish literature," he claims in the title essay of *Solidarity, Solitude*, "is practically the same as becoming a member of a religious order with very strict rules." There are two literatures in this church. "The first reminds us of literatures created in other European countries, literatures written by mere mortals—by artists devoting their lives to a search for meaning, symbol, expression." As for the second, it "has a different author: it is written directly by the intelligentsia, the intellectual élite, a social stratum. The intelligentsia write it with an enormous, rapacious goose feather, and write it to cope with collective aches and unhappiness." It was this second literature, Zagajewski explains, a phantom government of select souls that orders one "to write or not write decrees," that authored *The Unrepresented World*. In "Solidarity, Solitude," the skeptical Zagajewski has snapped the goose feather in two and, like Gombrowicz, written

a manifesto against manifestos.

It would be a mistake, however, to characterize Zagajewski as the Gombrowicz of contemporary Polish letters. Zagajewski himself realizes that although Gombrowicz may have broken his goose feather, he never got around to leaving the church. "Even Gombrowicz, an uncompromising individual when giving Poles advice," he writes in "Solidarity, Solitude," "expressed his views as if they pertained to everybody." In Zagajewski's eyes, Gombrowicz was a blasphemer of sorts, his tirades against the church of Polish literature as ecclesiastical as the institution he reviled.

In his prose, Zagajewski tries to avoid this trap by cultivating a guarded historicism, a temperament expressed most vividly in the discussions of Friedrich Nietzsche that figure prominently in *Solidarity, Solitude* and *Two Cities*. In *Two Cities*, Zagajewski discusses Nietzsche's *The Use and Abuse of History*, in which Nietzsche ridicules the historicism of philologists. No sooner does Zagajewski credit Nietzsche for attacking the pedantry of history than he argues that the philosopher's skepticism leads almost "to discounting memory. Historical memory appears to him as the opposite of creativity." Such nihilism, Zagajewski continues, was perfected by communism, which literally "declared war on memory. Feeling uncertain about its freshly declared utopia, communism was like a madman who throws his most valuable possessions from a fifteen-story window.... Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance were depicted in schoolbooks as epochs full of mistakes, ravings, misunderstandings, and crimes."

Zagajewski turns to another book about historical understanding, Zbigniew Herbert's *Barbarian in the Garden*, as a counterweight. Published in Poland in 1962 after Herbert had made his first trip to the West, the book contains Herbert's impressions of the cathedrals, museums, paintings, and sculpture that he saw during his travels in France and Italy. Zagajewski first learned of Herbert shortly after the book's publication, when the elder poet came to his high school and read poems as well as a few passages from *Barbarian in the Garden*. "It never occurs to him to get angry at historicism," Zagajewski observes. "Historical

memory, and especially the loveliest component of it, which has been preserved in works of art, is something absolutely vivifying." *Barbarian in the Garden*, Zagajewski concludes, "can be interpreted as the notes of a man who is revived by his contact with small, sunny towns, the receptacles of history."

TWO CITIES AND *Another Beauty* abound with similar notes, the sketches of a writer in search of a usable past, a sense of the past that quickens the present instead of deadening it, that nourishes solitude instead of poisoning it. "A repugnant civilization is in decline," Zagajewski wrote in 1990 in "Changes in the East" in *Two Cities*. "[B]ut it shaped me, I revolted against it, I tried to flee it; whether I like it or not, I am most certainly marked by it. It will be a while before I find out what has really happened for me." But Me is not the sole subject of Zagajewski's Mondays and Tuesdays. In *Two Cities* and *Another Beauty*, the mirror of self-reflection is silvered by the lives of others. Both books feature Herbertesque descriptions of paintings and cathedrals viewed in Krakow and Paris, but more interesting are Zagajewski's portraits of towns and people. He is especially fascinated by people caught up in the quotidian, "or rather in defending the quotidian from the attacks of a fanaticism embedded in historical routine," as he writes in *Another Beauty*.

Zagajewski was born in Lvov one month after the armistice. Four months later, his family was uprooted when Lvov passed into Soviet hands. Three generations of Zagajewskis had to move west to Gliwice, a formerly German town about thirty miles north of Auschwitz. His relatives are emigrants in their own country, and as a child he was enchanted by their rhapsodies about the lost paradise, Lvov. "Things were different with Lvov leaves. They were eternal, eternally green and eternally alive, indestructible and perfect. . . . Their only flaw was their absence, and even their nonexistence." But Zagajewski feels the tug of the imperfect Gliwice as well, its bridges and balconies, park and swimming pool, even its river, "transformed years ago into an industrial sewer and reeking of chemicals, not water." A huge gulf opens between Zagajewski and his elders'

generation, one that makes writing about them all the more necessary.

The Gliwice of "Two Cities" teems with people who have built fragile fortresses out of their pasts. There are neighbors who "carried their pasts around like moth balls. Old fashioned suits, summer jackets with short sleeves, creases pressed for all eternity into fine wool trousers, shoes from twenty years ago. They walked in them all gingerly, so as not to damage the soles or nick the leather." A similar cast of eccentrics populates *Another Beauty*. Early on, Zagajewski recalls moving from Gliwice to Krakow to attend the Jagiellonian University, and he rents a room from a Mrs. C., a former member of the landed gentry "with a cross, homely face like a crushed doughnut," who never left her fourth floor apartment. She "refused to enforce a treaty with reality," Zagajewski says, "she had decided to remain an heiress, a mistress of an estate." Zagajewski eventually relocates to the lodgings of a Mr. M., a retired court clerk who owned four pre-war suits and preserved them by lying "motionless on a sofa in a kitchen, and if he used up anything, it could only be oxygen and time." And at the Jagiellonian there is a Professor U., who endorsed the state's atrocities without reservation. "The bourgeois and landed gentry were shot for his benefit, the peasants were starved, the intellectuals murdered," Zagajewski notes.

WHAT'S STRIKING about these portraits is that they are neither triumphalist nor sentimental, tales neither of progress nor decline. It is through his subtle recollections of these people that Zagajewski avoids succumbing to their faults: Mrs. C.'s blind devotion to a past that smothers the present, and Professor U.'s embrace of a revolutionary present that murders all links to the past. Some people are pitied and others scorned, but all are treated by Zagajewski as figments of the past that are part of the tangible reality of his present. There is a little of Mr. M. about Zagajewski: he is thrifty, preserving memories without wanting to wear them out.

Or perhaps not. "I will say, however, that memory should not be accorded so high a

place," Zagajewski writes in "Two Books," just after praising *Barbarian in the Garden*. "It certainly does not deserve to be monopolistic or dictatorial. Memory is an indispensable component of creating culture, but isn't it true that it records and preserves the creative act rather than expresses itself in it?" For all his doubts about memory, Zagajewski is less concerned about memory per se than with the way a writer approaches and even transforms it. Zagajewski wants to write about the past without becoming its valet; he wants his prose to assume the function of a historical chronicle without falling prey to antiquarianism. Memory is only as indispensable as the art used to evoke it.

Two Cities, for instance, is a delicately patterned book that shatters the illusion of a well-ordered past. It is pitched athwart unresolved contrasts, either between two writers (Nietzsche and Herbert), two cities (Lvov and Gliwice), or two genres (memoir and critical essay). Moreover, these contrasts do more than signal the presence of Zagajewski's shaping hand. They create a history of temperaments in opposition, drawing attention to the intricacies of historical understanding itself.

Consider the book's first half. Zagajewski's recollection of Lvov ("Two Cities") is followed by "Open Archives," a series of five dramatic monologues in which unidentified, fictional former communist officials are given an opportunity to explain themselves. Perhaps the most intricate of these monologues is "Betrayal," in which a Party hack, prompted by an interviewer, defends his character assassination of dissident writers. The monologue does more than measure the cut of the official's homespun suit of compromises and lies. It is wide ranging and at times remarkably sly and ambivalent. Several of the hack's observations echo those made by Zagajewski in "Two Cities": "A historian sees people from a given period as if they were mannequins steered by the spirit of history." (Zagajewski: "For some time now, I have been convinced that even if totalitarianism is not History, History has something totalitarian in it. It commands a marshal who calls himself *Zeitgeist*.") Yet for all his intelligence, the writer, unlike Zagajewski, lacks empathy, and it's on account of this failing that he betrays others as well as himself. In the end

he reveals himself to be a cynic and a brute, altogether a truly nasty piece of work.

This play of contrasts reaches an intense pitch in *Another Beauty*, which is a hodgepodge of untitled, unnumbered pieces: portraits, reminiscences, aphorisms, narratives, critical asides, glosses, and reflections, some distilled into a few words and others flowing for many paragraphs. Over the course of a dozen pages Zagajewski might touch on everything from his undergraduate studies in psychology at the Jagiellonian to Krakow's Renaissance architecture to the behavior of Mr. U., with some of the passages being nothing more than lyrical descriptions of quotidian experience, such as "An orange lay on the table. The shrieks and laughter of children rose from the courtyard below. It was four in the afternoon." The book is a swirl of discontinuities, a prose geography akin to Zagajewski's favorite Parisian haunts: "The beautiful Paris surfaces where the city's different strata meet: fragments of medieval structures stand along broad, modern streets, a vast square shaped by Napoleon I abuts a riverside boulevard." It's the juxtaposition of, say, Zagajewski's portraits of Mrs. C. and Mr. U. and his attempts to glimpse a quotidian experience free of a zeitgeist or ideology that lends *Another Beauty* its poignancy and verve.

It's a hard-won style, and one far from the strict sentences of *Solidarity*, *Solitude*. That book is urgent and quarrelsome; it is tirelessly dialectical and a tad pedantic, the work of someone who has broken with the avant-garde but hasn't quite shaken its rhetoric from his prose. Contrasts make up the fabric of *Another Beauty*, too, but they are not hectored into a pattern. The work of memory and self-reflec-

tion is undertaken without contest or difficulty. Zagajewski is preternaturally calm, seeming to derive pleasure from nothing but the telling itself, happily losing one thread of thought to take up another. At first this is a little bewildering, but gradually and almost imperceptibly, like the young Zagajewski finding his way around the tangled alleyways and courtyards of Krakow's Old Market, one recognizes landmarks and rhythms, and gradually a whole way of life and thought emerges.

“WHO HAS once met / irony will burst into laughter / during the prophet's lecture,” Zagajewski writes in the poem “Ode to Plurality.” It's a lesson he has learned well, and there's no better indication than the absence of apocalyptic despair in his three prose books. There's turbulence and an occasional squall, but these never swell into thunder. This is hardly surprising. Apocalypse is the most fevered, enduring expression of the avant-garde's theory of creative destruction: The old order is leveled and innovation rises from its ashes. Literary forms are discarded, new ones forged, and social health is restored. It's a heady view of art, one deeply wedded to a vision of utopia, something that does not figure in Zagajewski's prose. While the absence of apocalypse suggests that Zagajewski has moved beyond the avant-garde, the incredible variety and intricacy of his prose make clear that he is still in the midst of his own quiet revolution. ●

JOHN PALATTELLA writes about poetry for several publications, including the *London Review of Books*, the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, and the *Nation*.

Put DISSENT on Your Credit Card!

Our circulation has grown with each issue for the last several years. The largest increase has been in bookstore and newsstand sales. We welcome these new readers, but each copy they buy costs us money, and money is hard to come by for a left magazine. Because the U.S. Post Office, in good social democratic fashion, is the cheapest means of distributing magazines, we make money on subscriptions. Now we've made subscribing easier. You can use your credit card. So, please, subscribe now, and while you are at it, subscribe for two years: that is an even bigger help.

The Debate on Decency

Editors:

Michael Walzer's "Can There Be a Decent Left?" (Spring 2002) poses a loaded either/or question. My concern is that the administration is using the terrorist tragedy of 9/11 for a foreign (and domestic) policy agenda that goes far beyond a response to Osama bin Laden and the Taliban. The bombing of the World Trade Center and the wanton loss of life have become the pretext for unfolding a strategic plan for American domination of key areas of the world and something like a permanent war based, not on terrorism, but on imposing the U.S. government's will on a whole range of countries. Surely Bush's invention of an evil axis of terrorism embracing a number of countries that oppose U.S. policy and his announcement of a new approach to the use of nuclear weapons in possible pre-emptive strikes against these and (implicitly) other countries can hardly be justified by the calamity of 9/11. Nor should we as citizens of the United States be willing to accept that the role of our government is to impose the values of capitalism everywhere in the world.

Along with this escalation of military intervention, Bush and Ashcroft have spearheaded a major assault on the Constitution and hard-won democratic rights, likewise justified in the name of national security against terrorism.

I always thought that *Dissent* was, in part at least, a journal willing to oppose and stand up to government repression. If Walzer's is indeed your new policy, you should at least have the decency to change your name.

IRWIN SILBER
Oakland, Calif.

Editors:

Readers of Michael Walzer's "Can There Be a Decent Left?" might like to know that not all leftist critiques of American foreign policy since the Vietnam War have been "stupid, overwrought, [and] grossly inaccurate." See, among many other valuable books, Gar Alperovitz, *Cold War Essays*; Richard Barnett, *Roots of War*; Jan Black, *Sentinels of Empire*; William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Mili-*

tary and CIA Intervention Since World War II; Frank Brodhead and Edward Herman, *Demonstration Elections*; Noam Chomsky, *The Culture of Terrorism*, *Deterring Democracy*, *Necessary Illusions*, *Rogue States*, *Towards a New Cold War*, and *World Orders Old and New*; Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent* and *The Political Economy of Human Rights*; Robert Engler, *The Politics of Oil*; Richard Falk, *Revolutionaries and Functionaries*; Alexander George, *Western State Terrorism*; William Greider, *One World Ready or Not*; Robin Hahnel, *Panic Rule!*; Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War*; Edward Herman, *The Real Terror Network*; Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback*; Mary Kaldor, *The Baroque Arsenal*; Michael Klare, *Beyond the Vietnam Syndrome*, *Low Intensity Warfare*, *Resource Wars*, *Supplying Repression*, and *War Without End*; Michael McClintock, *The American Connection*; Frances Moore Lappé, et al., *Aid As Obstacle*; James Petras, *Empire or Republic?*; John Pilger, *Hidden Agendas*; Stephen Shalom, *Imperial Alibis*; Ken Silverstein, *Private Warriors*; Holly Sklar, *Trilateralism*; and E.P. Thompson, et al., *Exterminism and Cold War*.

GEORGE SCIALABBA
Cambridge, Mass.

Editors:

This is a powerful piece of opinion writing that cuts through so much of the muck that has become so embarrassing to me. Walzer's suggestion to begin with decency and then see what happens seems so right. Without getting on my patriotic high horse, I believe that America, too, begins with decency, moves on to sympathy, and proceeds to action. There is plenty of room for good honest dissent from both the left and the right. I would suggest that Americans have the duty to demand nothing less than this.

ASHBY BEAL
Washington, D.C.

Editors:

I thought I was a feminist, but now I have discovered that I am a male-identified bloodthirsty racist, all because I supported the Afghan War. This was a necessary war. It was not about machismo or male displays of

power as some feminists believe. I hate to admit that I agree with Bush on anything, but I have to admit that he was right. I'm not going to oppose a policy just because I don't agree with Bush's domestic agenda.

There is also a part of the left that is completely pacifist and probably opposed WWII. I live in Philadelphia, the home of the [Quaker] AFSC, so I am familiar with this part of the left. I suppose I should modify that statement and add that many of them are opposed to all violence unless the person using violence is Palestinian, then it's "understandable." It is never "understandable" for America to use violence.

It also disturbs me that many leftists and feminists saw this war as a fight for global capitalism. It was not. The world is a much more complicated place than that.

SUSAN STEIN
Philadelphia, Pa.

Editors:

Michael Walzer's furious critique of the American left would have been more impressive had its targets not been straw.

Walzer seems to have mistaken some leftists' lack of surprise at news of the 9/11 attacks for an ugly indifference or, far worse, a secret joy, rather than for what it really was—nausea and rage over the irresponsible policies that have endangered our nation's people. 9/11 was the worst day of my life. It was the worst day in the life of every other leftist I know. What made me upset that day all the more profound and awful, in addition to our horror at the massacre and our anger at the perpetrators, was the knowledge that for years we had all been Cassandras. We had seen how our nation's realpolitik had helped sow a killing rage in the hearts of a whole generation of militant Muslims, and others. Watching the Towers fall, my hopes fell with them, because I knew very well what would be coming next: an ineffectual, indiscriminate military campaign that would only breed more terrorists, the further militarization of our culture and economy, the further erosion of our civil liberties, the strengthening of American nativist and xenophobic sentiment. (The one thing I did not foresee was the new sycophancy of the liberal intelligentsia.)

For Walzer to suggest that those of us on the left were not also weeping on 9/11 for the innocents murdered that day is, in a word, despicable. Nonetheless, it is consistent with the cartoon he draws of the left as a whole. Walzer slaps the left for its double standards, suggesting that leftists are unwilling, or just constitutionally unable, to criticize third world regimes. He then enumerates four "reasons" why this might be so. Let me take each of these in turn.

First, Walzer suggests that the left's immoral or "indecent" condition is owed to the fact it persists in clinging to an outmoded Marxist and anti-imperialist ideology. Here, there is a grain of truth, though only a grain. He is right that in the case of Bosnia, there were indeed some on the left who tried to pack that conflict into a neatly bound, classically anti-imperialist Marxist package. Yes, there are still a few crude materialists banging around out there. Yet it is all too characteristic of Walzer's approach that he ignores any facts that inconveniently get in the way of his caricature. For example, there were many others who criticized the U.S. bombing campaign in Bosnia not because it reflected some "materialist" or capitalist maneuver (for example, for oil), but because of the likely intention behind the campaign (that is, the rather transparent agenda to reaffirm and solidify American dominance in NATO). In other words, many on the left felt that U.S. policymakers—the same ones, incidentally, who had long ignored the whole ugly problem in the Balkans precisely because it was seen as nonessential to our own interests, were finally intervening on the "right" side, but for the wrong reasons. I submit that the idea that the U.S. intervened for prudential rather than ethical reasons is borne out by the prevailing realpolitik in American diplomacy. If Walzer seriously thinks that the United States intervenes anywhere in the world chiefly for "humanitarian" reasons, he has not perused *Foreign Affairs* in recent decades. But then, he must also have an uncomfortable time trying to explain why, in the case of the single most urgent humanitarian disaster in fifty years, the Rwandan genocide, the Clinton administration not only refused to intervene, but in fact consciously denied that genocide was unfolding.

Walzer's second "explanation" for why American leftists cannot criticize thugs like the Taliban is that we leftists feel so powerless, and experience such profound alienation from our culture that we are incapable of having "decent" values, like love of country. Here, again, I grant Walzer a grain of truth. As Nietzsche pointed out long ago, the powerless have a penchant for railing against the world and for nursing grudges against the dominant few. Because we on the left have indeed been cut out of power and have been forced for so many years to bear witness to the senseless and immoral policies of the power elite, many of us are indeed desperate and embittered. It in no way follows that therefore we have no love of country or that our geopolitical analysis is skewed. One might have thought that trying to pierce the propaganda veil of the mainstream, corporate-owned mass media in order to observe the reckless dangers provoked by our policies might be a "patriotic" act. Or that defending our Consti-

tution from religious fanatics like John Ashcroft—because religious fundamentalists and theocrats, Walzer should know, also come in Christian and Jewish flavors—would be considered an honorable and quintessentially American act. Yet in Walzer's eyes such actions border on treason. How else are we to take his remark that the left's "pathology . . . has already done us great damage"?

With especial venom, Walzer accuses progressives of being unwilling "to join in a serious debate about how to protect the country against future terrorist attacks." Here he positions himself perilously close to the Cheney-Lieberman axis, which is on a witch-hunt against "traitorous" American academics who do not fall into ideological lockstep with the new "patriotism."

This is Walzer's third point: the left is guilty for its "moral purism of blaming America first." How sweetly this echoes two hundred years of rightist discourse throughout the world! Whenever those on the left, whether in England, France, Germany, Indonesia, or Peru have criticized their government's actions, they have always been accused of putting other nations first. Anyone who fails to chant the lies of one's own nation state must be a deluded traitor. I cannot but wonder: is Chalmers Johnson, who knows a great deal more about American foreign policy than Walzer, a "moral purist" when he shows, empirically (in *Blowback*), just why so many Japanese and Italians and Puerto Ricans, and, yes, Pakistanis and Egyptians resent the United States as much as they do?

Walzer's final maneuver is to reiterate his position that the left hobbles itself by "not being entitled to criticize anyone else" besides the United States. I again grant a grain, but only a grain, to this. I agree that historically, too few leftists have proved willing to criticize the human rights violations of erstwhile "allies" like Fidel's Cuba. But once again, Walzer's angry blunderbuss strikes its target indifferently. Perhaps Walzer does not recall the courageous efforts of groups like Joanne Landy's Campaign for Peace and Democracy, which, in the 1980s, forged links with dissidents in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe who wanted neither totalitarian communism nor American capitalism. (The Campaign circulated countless petitions in support of dissidents in the East bloc which were signed by—gasp!—American leftists.) Maybe he doesn't remember the nuclear freeze movement, which despised Soviet missiles as much as American ones. No matter. In any event, while it is true that some on the left have not always faced the lapses and abuses of their erstwhile third world counterparts, it is patently false to suggest that leftists have in general apologized for repressive regimes simply because they happened to be singled

out for American military or economic punishment. Who says that the enemy of my enemy must be my friend? No one I know. Can Walzer name a single prominent American leftist who has ever declared sympathies for America's jilted lovers—thugs like Noriega or Qaddafi? For the brutal apparatchiks who seized power in Grenada in 1982? Walzer paints the left as being parochial and anti-intellectual and "stupid" in the face of subtlety. Yet it is he who can't seem to grasp the complexities of our world—e.g., the possibility that the United States might assert an imperial prerogative against good people and bad, client states as well as independent-minded regimes.

What is most offensive—and self-serving—about Walzer's screed, however, is his repeated mantra that the left is so alienated from the American public, and from reality, that it succumbs to a blind apocalyptic rage that must forever alienate it from "our fellow citizens," as he so piously puts it. But what has the left been trying to do, throughout its long and desperate history, if not to communicate its ideas to a larger public? Granted, the left has not always gone about this communication in the best way—in part, yes, because of occasional outbursts of self-righteousness and a hip disregard for appearances (in politics, appearances are all, as Machiavelli noted). Still, one might think that Walzer could acknowledge that if most Americans don't even know there is a left, that has not a little to do with the fact that its leading lights, like Noam Chomsky, have been blacklisted from the mainstream media. Walzer might also have the heart to mention a little detail Habermas terms "the colonization of the lifeworld": the dangerous and alarming erosion of the public sphere and civil society by capitalism. If the left seems so often to be talking to itself, it is largely because it has been forced to rely on nineteenth-century tactics to do so. Walzer's accusations are therefore grossly unfair and mean-spirited.

JOHN SANBONMATSU
Chicago, Ill.

Editors:

Michael Walzer's "Can There Be a Decent Left?" is a story I have heard repeatedly since September 11, from the right and the center. Why the heck should I be hearing it from him? I fit his profile fairly closely with one exception: I'm not the clueless moral retard he depicts. He says we are indecent and have lost our bearings. I say, nonsense.

Consider U. S. foreign policy. In that regard, I honor Château Thierry, the Argonne Forest, the St. Mihiel salient and Belleau Wood; Anzio, Normandy, and Berlin; Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Tarawa, Saipan, the Philip-

piners, and Iwo Jima. But do you expect me to ignore Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki; Iran, Guatemala, Indonesia, and Brazil; Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, East Timor, El Salvador, and Nicaragua? What moral person would do that?

Consider ideology. The communists and Spartacists are few and far between these days. I and many others work to make the United States more like the social democracies of Europe.

Consider alienation. Progressives I know accept what is good about our political economy—the Bill of Rights, the openness, due process—when it's accorded—and so on. But we are revolted by the drug wars, systematic racism among police and prosecutors, environmental despoliation, and the steady loss of our civil liberties. You bet we're alienated—why wouldn't we be?—from a system that excludes anything to the left of the Democratic Party from political power and from access to the national media?

Consider guilt for our prosperity. Oh, bother! People who feel that way live that way and usually don't trouble others.

And what about a topic he scarcely mentions? In my experience, most of those on the left who opposed the Afghan War did so for deeply held ethical or moral reasons. They are against war, pure and simple. There were conscientious objectors to World War II. Why wouldn't others oppose the Afghan War and the bombing of Iraq on similar grounds?

Walzer kept mentioning "the left" in his article. Where does he stand? It would be a heck of a lot better if he would simply tell us straight away how *he* feels about September 11, patriotism, terrorists' threats, civil liberties, the Afghan War, and so on, and spare us the sermon.

JOHN F. COWAN
Scotts Valley, Calif.

Editors:

Thanks to Michael Walzer for writing "Can There Be a Decent Left?" It is an excellent and much-needed piece. The reaction after September 11 highlighted in a serious way that the left (not only the U.S. left, for in New Zealand and Australia exactly the same responses reverberated) "has lost its bearings," and that its now dominant mix of self-hatred, guilt, and resentment is both morally unappealing and politically disarming. Walzer's reasons as to why the left has lost its bearings make sense. I wondered a lot about this after the September events and wrote an extensive polemic at the time against some of the knee-jerk positions being taken by intellectuals on

the left. I know from the e-mails that I received that there are a good number of decent leftists who are fed up with the "purist" public positions being taken by so many left-liberal notables. (Of course that number pales in comparison with the number of uncommitted observers who are simply, and rightly, disgusted or flabbergasted by this rancid purism.)

I find it heartening that there are people on the left, like Walzer, who are prepared not only to publicly criticize the *schadenfreude*, but to state frankly that "the left needs to begin again." It is as if, since the early sixties, the left has been set upon a long detour from common sense. If the perverse and incomprehensible response of so many leftists to September 11 has any merit, it will have been to cast a spotlight on what has become, over the course of a generation, a profound deterioration of moral and political judgment. "To begin again. . ." is indeed what is required.

PETER MURPHY
Wellington, New Zealand

ED. NOTE: Peter Murphy is a co-editor of *Thesis Eleven*.

Editors:

Congratulations to Michael Walzer on a perceptive analysis of the dysfunctional American left. I have always considered myself a liberal but have been dismayed by the appalling views coming from the institutional left over the past six months. This article uncannily reflects many of my thoughts and feelings since 9/11. Note to Walzer: You will be hounded and pilloried by the institutional left, ruled as they are by a parochial insularity and dogmatism. Stay the course. What American liberalism needs most now is voices of reason and sanity, such as yours, so that perhaps we can forge a new, viable left not based on an ideology of reflexive hatred of America.

GARY PETERSON
Arlington, Va.

Michael Walzer Replies

I am grateful to all the people who wrote or phoned or (it actually happened) stopped me in the street to express support for my "decent left" article. Among the supporters, I will only respond to Gary Peterson: I suppose that I have been "hounded" a bit by the institutional left, but it won't be difficult to "stay the course" because there is a lot of sympathy and agreement out there. The left covers a good swath of territory, and though there are some dogmatists who would like to fence it in and police it, there are more people who want it open—including people who have drifted away and might drift back if we

give them reasons for doing that.

I am also grateful to all the people, except for a few of the ideological police, who wrote in opposition to my article. I meant to be provocative, and they were indeed provoked. I will try to respond to their arguments, this time (a little) less provocatively.

Irwin Silber thinks that 9/11 has become a pretext for American domination of key parts of the world. OK, *Dissent* will oppose all efforts at domination, wherever they are manifest. But that argument doesn't seem to fit Afghanistan, where the immediate danger is that the United States will walk away from its responsibilities, not that it will stay on and "dominate" the Afghans. What the American left should be demanding is that our government participate in and help pay for the reconstruction of the country. Does Silber want that? Who can tell? He feels no need to defend an alternative response to "the calamity" of 9/11; he thinks it is enough that he is against what the response has been and what (he is sure) it will be.

George Scialabba provides a nice list of books. Not all of them were written since the Vietnam War: one of the best, Engler's *Politics of Oil*, came out in 1961. The rest, with a few exceptions (the first two on his list, Alperovitz and Barnett, among them) seem to me to bear out my critique; I could not easily have provided so many examples.

John Cowan is also a man given to lists. Please look back at his list of American crimes. It includes some real crimes, which have been strongly criticized in *Dissent* (Hiroshima, Guatemala, Vietnam, for example). But it also includes nasty regimes (like Indonesia in the 1960s) that the United States supported but didn't create, which were in fact the products of local history and political culture. Cowan writes as if only the United States has agency; the rest of the world is passive and never responsible. We act, the world endures. That is a common view, I suppose, but it seems to me crazy.

Cowan claims that the bulk of left opposition to the Afghan War was pacifist in character. I don't believe that, but let's leave the facts aside. He and I can agree in our respect for a consistent and conscientious pacifism. But pacifists have the same obligation that the rest of us have: to explain to their fellow citizens how they believe the United States can protect itself against future terrorist attacks. There is indeed a serious pacifist literature on nonviolent resistance, but I haven't heard anyone try to explain how that might be effective in this case.

As for speaking "straight away" about my own views of 9/11, terrorism, the Afghan War, and so on—I tried to do that in the Winter 2002 *Dissent* in an article called

"Five Questions about Terrorism." But my answers were meant to be tentative; this argument will be a long one.

John Sanbonmatsu wrote a piece as long as my own; it was shortened for publication here. Note the "grains of truth" he allows me; I am glad of every grain; they do add up. But clearly we have many deep disagreements, and I can only pursue a few. Before doing that, however, I must clear up one point. I nowhere suggest that left opponents of the Afghan War are traitors or that "their actions border on treason"; this is a willful misreading of my article. When I say that the failure of many leftists to think about how best to defend the country "has already done us much damage," the "us" refers to the left, not the country. The country is undamaged.

Sanbonmatsu claims that he knew before 9/11 what was coming, and he knew on 9/11 what was coming next, and he knows now what will be coming. That makes him, I think, a national resource—if only he gave some evidence of all this knowledge. It doesn't seem to be empirical knowledge, but rather a set of deductions from a theory. What did this theory tell him? That our realpolitik policies "had helped sow a killing rage in a whole generation of militant Muslims." And why not in a whole generation of Vietnamese? Or Central Americans? Why did the violence come, and how did he know it would only come, from Muslims? And why does he think that the war in Afghanistan is sure to breed more terrorists? The Russians fought for eight years in that country, and fought far more brutally than we have, and yet there has not been a single Afghan terrorist attack on Russian civilians. How can he be so sure that we are "breeding" Afghan terrorists now? This is ideology, not knowledge.

Americans mostly disagree with Sanbonmatsu's arguments, he says, because of "the colonization of the lifeworld," that is, the takeover of civil society by capitalist forces. I do apologize for not invoking this Habermasian phrase and also for forgetting about the blacklisting of Noam Chomsky from the mainstream media. But isn't it a tribute to the fortitude of the lifeworld that Chomsky's books sell more copies than all the books of all the editors of *Dissent* taken together (this is a rough calculation)? I have rarely visited a bookstore that doesn't stock his books. I assume that this is capitalism at work: the booksellers wouldn't agree with Chomsky if they read him, but they don't have to read him, just sell him.

Sanbonmatsu provides some nice examples of decent left responses to Cuban human rights violations and to East European totalitarianism. I never doubted that there have been responses like that; otherwise it would not be possible to live on the left. And Sanbonmatsu knows that there have been indecent responses too (my "grains of

truth"). What the decent/indecent balance is going to be in the months and years to come seems to me radically uncertain. It is worth a good fight to improve the balance.

What Really Matters

Editors:

In his review of *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century* (Dissent, Spring 2002) Elliott Sclar claims that we did not deal with class inequalities or show how to build a coalition between the poor and working class. We believe, and *Place Matters* argues, that we can build a majoritarian political coalition for social and economic justice around an agenda to address the nation's urban crisis with fundamental reforms. Our political analysis starts by recognizing that the United States is now a majority suburban nation, but it stresses the growing economic, racial, and social diversity in the suburbs. We argue that no progressive effort to improve our urban areas can be successful unless it gives suburbanites—especially those who live in working- and lower-middle-class suburbs—a stake in the outcome. Our detailed analysis of voting trends suggests that this is possible, but that it will require labor activists, community organizers, liberal Democrats, and others to rethink their strategies. For example, we propose that in redistricting battles, progressives should push to shift some sure-fire Democratic voters from overwhelmingly safe congressional district seats into adjacent swing districts so that liberal Democrats can contest elections in these volatile and critical districts. We do not ignore class analysis. We present a detailed discussion of widening overall inequalities of wealth and income and of the often neglected importance of the spatial dimension of inequality, which, we argue, exacerbates the effects of overall inequality, narrowing the access of the urban poor to good schools, health care, bank loans, grocery stores, and many other basic goods and services. In addition, this isolation raises barriers to cross-class coalition building. Sclar claims that we exaggerate the degree of economic segregation. In fact, many studies show that economic segregation, particularly the spatial concentration of the poor, is substantial and rising. For example, John Kasarda has shown that the proportion of census tracts in the hundred largest cities with at least 20 percent in poverty increased from 27.3 percent in 1970 to 39.4 percent in 1990, while those with 40 percent poverty increased from 6 percent in 1970 to 13.7 percent of the total in 1990.

Sclar ignores our detailed examination of how progressive activists have sought to improve conditions for

the urban poor and working class in municipal politics. We conclude, however, that although these efforts make life better for poor and working-class families and neighborhoods, they do not counter underlying trends producing greater inequality, because municipalities lack the resources and legal authority to address these underlying trends.

Why are progressive local officials in such a fiscal straitjacket? We argue that federal policies—transportation, housing, tax laws, the siting of military bases and contracts, and others—have sorted people into separate and competing local jurisdictions in ways that favor business and the affluent. The impact of federal policies has been compounded by the fiscal fragmentation among metropolitan governments. The typical metro area has more than a hundred local governments, all seeking to attract investment and affluent residents and exclude the poor and the near poor. Most cities and suburbs have neither the capacity nor the desire to fund high quality basic municipal services. The net result is growing spatial inequality, in which the place where one lives definitely matters.

We propose a political strategy that will enable low-income, working-class, and middle-income people to coalesce around a shared policy agenda. Sclar's contention that our political strategy is "based on attacking the middle class"—or that we blame urban problems on "attempts by middle-class suburbanites to protect their turf from the poor"—is simply wrong. What we do advocate is dismantling the institutions and incentives that pit many suburban jurisdictions so strongly against the interests of the metropolitan whole. We do not oppose suburbs, but rather unregulated real estate development, government policies that promote sprawl, and a fiscal system that undermines the capacities of new suburbs, older suburbs, and central cities alike.

The policy agenda outlined in *Place Matters* seeks to level the metropolitan playing field and reduce competition among municipalities through regional cooperation on governance, taxation, and land use. It reduces economic inequalities and improves conditions for the poor by tightening labor markets, raising incomes, and expanding federal spending on social services, especially affordable rental housing and homeownership. Finally, we propose giving working people a stronger political voice by expanding voter rights and strengthening labor laws. Sclar says that the problem with our discussion of economic segregation is that "lifestyle is about wealth, not location." Although it is a truism that income is necessary to alleviate poverty, it does not follow that location is unimportant, especially when the concentration of poverty is an

important factor limiting access to economic opportunity.

Sclar finds it curious that we “do not deal with the phenomenon of gentrification.” In fact, we discuss in several places how federal programs and market forces have pushed poor and working-class people out of their neighborhoods to make way for more affluent residents, convention centers or sports complexes, and commercial development. We also point out that the main problem facing the urban poor is not islands of displacement in “hot” urban neighborhoods, but the widening gap in incomes, reinforced by the spatial separation of different income groups and the ways in which the structure of local government pits them against one another.

We find Sclar’s review to be a caricature of our argument. We encourage *Dissent* readers to decide for themselves whether our analysis makes sense.

PETER DREIER, JOHN MOLLENKOPF, TODD SWANSTROM

Elliott Sclar Replies

The problem is not that Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom ignored social class. The problem is that they too heavily conflated it with place. The book’s central theme is that “[n]ever before have economic classes sorted themselves into separate governments the way they have in the United States today.” This is incorrect. A few exceptions aside, the city and town boundaries of metropolitan America are poor proxies for economic class distinctions. These boundaries contain small neighborhoods with differing social mixes. A political strategy built on the belief that the boundaries reflect economically homogeneous places has a strong potential to be counterproductive.

Their letter speaks of “the institutions and incentives that pit many suburban jurisdictions so strongly against the interests of the metropolitan whole.” My argument is that these polarizing institutions and incentives are not geographic, and neither are the opposing interests.

The authors are never really clear about whether they believe that place is causal to their analysis or secondary. As they say here, place “exacerbates the effects of overall inequality.” If place is merely exacerbating—and I agree that it is—then why frame a political strategy designed to reduce social inequality around a factor that is not causal?

The Kasarda data that they now substitute for the Massey data in their book highlights this problem. Once

again they fail to consider causal complexity and focus instead on spatial effect. In my review I argued that the middle class is in trouble. The Fiscal Policy Institute recently reported that in New York State over the last decade income inequality has increased not only between the top and the bottom but also between the top and the middle. The very rich are getting richer, more people are being pushed into poverty, and the middle class is getting weaker. That manifests itself in more poor people living in poorer neighborhoods, but place is not the cause of the problem.

I agree with many of the policies they advocate to promote metropolitan social equity. The difficulty is not policy, but the politics that flow from a misplaced emphasis on place. Progressives have few resources. It is important that they be invested wisely. Issues such as environmental quality and justice, anti-privatization, and so on, are more likely to sustain broad progressive regional coalitions than will an indictment of intra-jurisdictional fiscal inequity.

ED. NOTE: The editors wish to thank Robert Delboy for stepping in on five days notice and producing our cover design. We appreciate his grace under pressure and his sensitivity as we coped with the unexpected loss of our regular designer, Daniel McClain.

To Letter Writers

● *We welcome succinct letters from our readers. But because we have a long lead time for each issue, you have to send us your letter within three weeks of getting an issue of Dissent in order to get it into the next issue.*

● *Letters must be no more than 500 words, typed, double-spaced, and carry the full address and name of the sender. We reserve the right to edit letters down to fit our space and to choose which shall be printed. We are unable to acknowledge letters. Letters will not be returned to senders unless they are accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. We accept e-mail submissions to editors@dissentmagazine.org, but request that you also provide a street address.*

MUCH POST-9/11 advertising confuses patriotism with consumerism. But using the flag to sell things is an American tradition. While researching the life of my great-grandfather Edward Bellamy, the author of *Looking Backward*, I came across a noteworthy conflation of patriotic symbolism with greed. It concerned the Pledge of Allegiance. Edward's first cousin, Francis Bellamy, briefly became a socialist after reading Edward's celebrated political novel. Francis also wrote the Pledge of Allegiance. Francis's stint as a Christian socialist was enthusiastic, if brief. So too was his tenure as a Baptist minister. It may well be that his turn from socialism to reactionary politics was a response to his congregation's resistance to his left-wing ideas. He preached to them relentlessly about Christian obligations to the poor. And they grew weary and fired him. He then quit the ministry altogether.

Frances wrote the Pledge the next year, in 1892. It was the byproduct of a scheme to sell flags to public schools hatched by his employer, the *Youth's Companion*, the best-selling American magazine of the time. Management's idea was to have simultaneous flag-raising over the nation's schoolhouses on that quadricentennial Columbus Day. The celebrations were to coincide with the opening of the Chicago World's Fair. For the occasion, the magazine published an elaborate ceremony, written mostly by Bellamy, which included the Pledge.

More than twenty-six thousand flags were sold at cost—or so said the *Youth's Companion*. The surrounding campaign certainly enhanced the magazine's considerable prestige. Bellamy, as project manager, orchestrated a variety of pseudo-events, including a Presidential Proclamation and interviews with congressmen. He sent boiler-plate editorials to newspapers across the nation. The Pledge attained its canonical status through this media blitz. Nothing of its scope had occurred before.

Since it first appeared, the Pledge has been

surrounded by quarrels over ownership. Years after he wrote it, Francis discovered—after hearing a quiz show on the radio—that the *Companion* attributed authorship to his deceased boss at the magazine. Years of depositions, recriminations, and character assassinations ensued. Congress itself finally vindicated Francis, although this didn't prevent the later publication of a book-length polemic challenging his authorship.

In the meantime, Francis's politics kept drifting rightward, much like the uses to which the Pledge has since been put. In the xenophobic 1920s, he devised "A Plan for a Counterattack on the Nation's Internal Foes: How to Mobilize the Masses to Support Primary American Doctrines." This proposal aimed to harness the Pledge to a campaign against "traitors." For Francis, "traitors" included immigrants, Wobblies, and union members. The proposal was never published (though the desire to use the Pledge to purge has endured).

As I followed Francis Bellamy's rightward journey, it occurred to me that the eventual identification of Americanism with capitalism was implicit in the flag-and-pledge campaign. The *Companion* sent one hundred "free" flag "shares" to students across the country. They, in turn, were to raise money to buy their school flags by selling these shares to classmates at ten cents each. Though the official theme of the Columbus Day extravaganza was the Enlightenment—manifested in the inadvertent "discovery" of the New World and the establishment of America's "free" (tax-supported) schools—the flag-and-pledge caper actually equated citizenship with capitalism, and stakeholding with holding stock. Old Glory wasn't a sacred symbol of the nation's indivisible unity, but a commodifiable object like any other. Perhaps it is time to think again about a meaning of a patriotism that is neither commodified nor cheap.

MICHAEL BELLAMY

Apply Liberal

Lather, Rinse,
Repeat

Revitalizing
Progressive
Politics

\$2.95

THE AMERICAN
PROSPECT

Detangling
Right-wing
Schemes

Nourishing
The Liberal
Imagination

www.prospect.org

1-888-MUST-READ

“The nation’s most influential liberal publication*”
is available by subscription, on the web, and in bookstores. **Newsday*

SHERI ALPERT

MEDICAL DATA WARS

MICHAEL BELLAMY

SELLING THE FLAG

BOGDAN DENITCH

BALKAN ENDGAME

STEPHEN J. FORTUNATO, JR.

CORPORATE CRIME AND VOTING RIGHTS

JOSEPH M. SCHWARTZ

BEYOND ENRON

A R G U M E N T S

**Nelson Lichtenstein and Daphne Eviatar
debate union strategies**

**Readers respond to
*"Can There Be a Decent Left?"***

B O O K S

- **JAMES T. CAMPBELL** on Glenn Loury
- **STEPHEN F. DIAMOND** on China's economic policy
- **JOHN PALATTELLA** on Adam Zagajewski